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IRIS LYS
SANNE VAGHI
DANICA MORGAN

THE TWINS OF SALEM

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LOOKED SO GOOD

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Russia seems to be in the news for all the wrong reasons lately, but take a step back, dig a little deeper and you'll find there are also plenty of great stories to be told. Stories about vibrant cities, amazing art and inspiring artists, like Moscow-based tattooer Jane Zimina whose mastery of black ink is out of this world.

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Can you get tattooed whilst pregnant? What about when breastfeeding? Should you take children into tattoo shops? To conventions? Rebecca Givens talks tattoos and parenting with five different tattooists.

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The inseparable twin brothers Ryan and Matt Murray of Salem, MA, are uncanny in their ability to simulate a reflection wherever they go and with whatever they touch. They travel through life like one unified vessel, living and working together, dressing alike, and tattooing in a manner whereby it is near impossible to tell who made what...

58 AS ABOVE SO BELOW

As you may have noticed recently, Wayne Simmons has gone deep into the hills and turned himself inside out to find *The Real Man*. As part of that rummaging about in his soul, he's been unearthing tattooers all over the place whose prime motivation with the craft is *The Spirit*. Let us begin...

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get tattooed? There was one artist in particular who Rebecca Givens was eager to pose these questions to: Belle Atrix.

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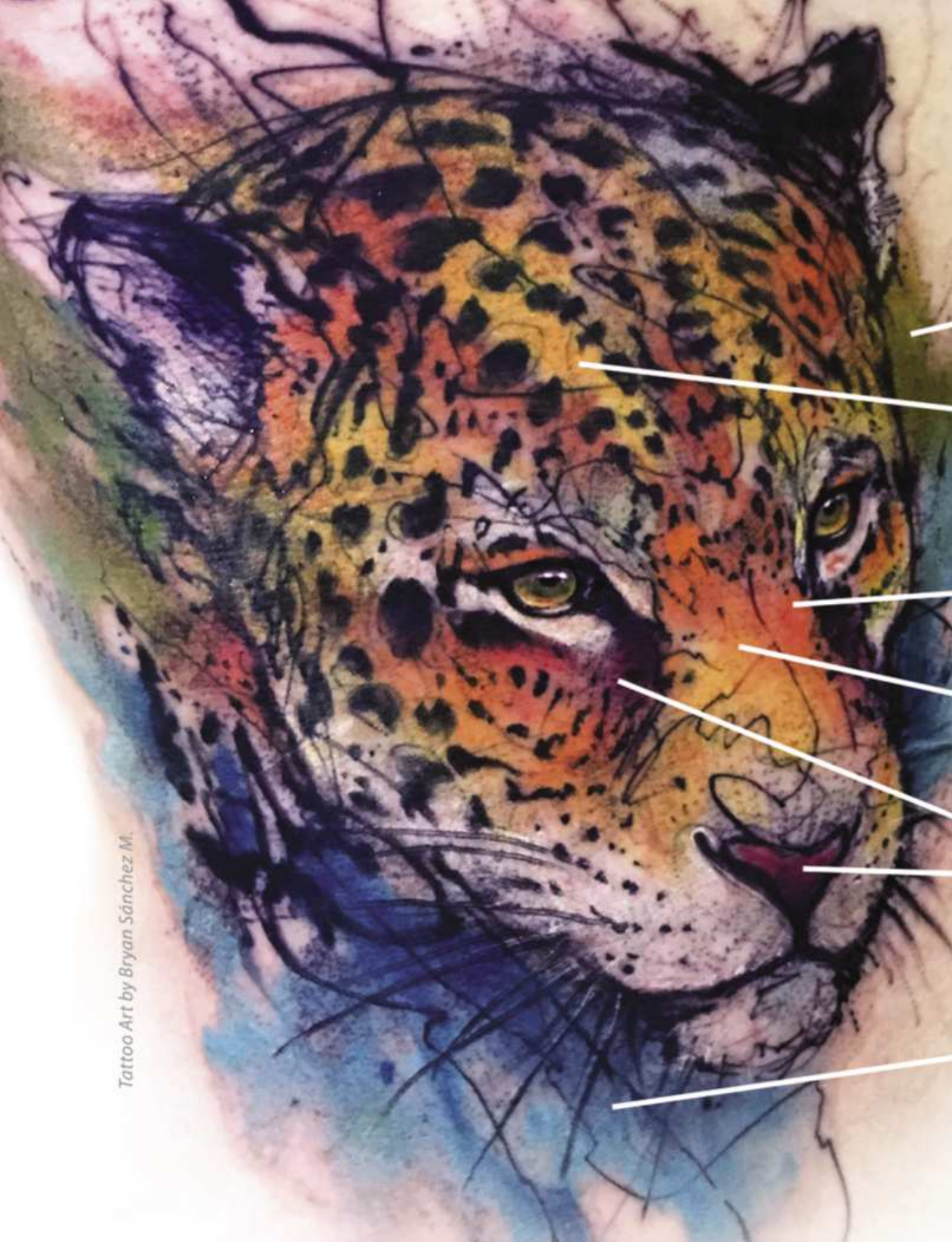
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SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING



Marc Bonin

The Body Thief

Lying. Lying is not great. When you lie, people get confused.

However, when you're a writer, it's not lying. It's called fiction. People win prizes for fiction. They get flowers thrown at them in the street and in the future, people decide that what you lied about was important enough to make millions of teenagers study it hard at school.

Sometimes.

Last issue, I told a bare faced fiction that I had moved to Switzerland when in fact, I had not. There was method behind the fiction though.

DOES AN AWARD FROM 2012 STILL COUNT WHEN YOU DIDN'T GET ANY BETTER



SION SMITH • EDITOR
editor@skindeep.co.uk

I wanted to illustrate a point that I couldn't get to any other way and that would be: Don't Believe Everything You Read.

It's easy to slap up on your website/social media bio 'Award Winning Artist' and it should mean something but the more I look, the more it didn't seem to. Does an award from 2012 still count when you didn't get any better or (as I have seen with my own eyes), worse in the years in between? I'm not



SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING

smashing up award winners victories with a hammer and pouring brimstone and treacle on them here. What I'm trying to get at is, there are as many (probably more) artists who have never won an award who are better suited to what you need from a tattooer. Maybe they won an award, maybe they didn't.

What you need to be looking at if you want some advice on the subject is an artists most recent work—that's always the best indicator of what you're likely to walk out of the door with.

To put it in perspective—back in 2009, Duffy won a Brit Award for Album of the Year. 10 years later, I dare say if you dropped her in a studio now, the results would not be the same. Her website is a picture of herself and a tumblr link that will try to sell you the latest air conditioning unit. This makes me sad. She was talented as hell.

And that's the thing about talent. If you're lucky it will last a lifetime but it can also last just five minutes. Anybody can get a lucky punch in and win an award for the best tattoo they have ever done in their life... it doesn't necessarily mean you'll get the same.

Look for consistency over months and years, not hours.

It doesn't end there. I recently spent the weekend at the Brussels Tattoo Convention with Bez and Mark Poole—two artists I respect immensely. Show aside, we also spent an afternoon clashing our heads together over many things concerning tattooing, one of which was how many people are photo-shopping their tattoos before posting them on their social feeds.

It's an easy thing to do. You take your photograph, drop it into Photoshop Express, tinker a little with some light (and God only knows what else) and boom... you've got yourself something that looks better than the work you actually did.

The moral of this additional story is not only should you not believe everything you read, but you should also be questioning everything you see out there.

It's my job to mention things like this... all I ever want to see is people deciding to get great work and actually getting it once that decision is made. It's not hard but the twenty first century road is apparently littered with more potholes than you can fill with rain.



IT'S NOT HARD BUT THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY ROAD IS APPARENTLY LITTERED WITH MORE POTHOLES THAN YOU CAN FILL WITH RAIN

The words I speak this issue are fact not fiction... and Switzerland? It's a beautiful place. I love it. They even named a town after me. Here's a little pic of its train station... ▣



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It is OK to haggle money off your tattoo?

This week I argued with a company about the cost of something—not a tattoo studio but a local printing shop. I was intending to publish a handmade booklet to raise money for charity and so was looking for the cheapest possible price in order for the project to be worthwhile.

When my nearest printing service quoted over £350 for a stack of A4 paper, I was in shock, at not just their blunt tone in refusing to help out with a fundraising project for the local hospital, but the steep price which I had presumed would be much, much less. Having previously worked in marketing for almost a decade, I thought I knew what I should be charged for a simple job of this kind.

What's more, the printer was insisting that they saddle stitched the book rather than let me do it myself—I had already planned to hand staple it, something I'd done before for handmade charity art zines. After various aggressive emails and no backing down from either party on either issue, I told the gentleman to "just leave it, I'll go elsewhere".

That evening, I was thinking about my communication with this provider and considered whether I would have demanded the same from my tattoo artist. Would I have challenged cost? Refused advice on how the maker wanted the product finished? No, I wouldn't have dreamt of it—so why was getting a tattoo any different from any other consumer service?

To many, it isn't, and every day tattooists deal with customers relentlessly trying to chip away at quoted prices, but to some of us, the haggling of money off the price of something as sacred as a tattoo is a big no-no. I think for me, this is an awareness of what the tattoo means creatively and emotionally to the artist, and to myself. There's something about the gravity of the procedure that demands a level of respect. But I guess there is an argument in there somewhere for why we could say the same about a printing company.

I think the final word in my previous sentence sets the record straight—with words like 'companies' and 'business', come connotations of profit, a man at the top, thus often a presumed opportunity to haggle. Most tattooists in the world could be classed as 'not for profit', as in, they're not in this game for the cash or to live like



Deborah Genchi

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE GRAVITY OF THE PROCEDURE THAT DEMANDS A LEVEL OF RESPECT



REBECCA RIMMER

millionaires, but because they couldn't live without this, their passion, and ours. They've probably spent a good few years in an un-earning apprenticeship and have worked ridiculous unpaid hours to get to where they are now. Most are also, whilst perhaps tied to one particular establishment, self-employed individuals rather than part of any larger money-making machine.

Yet, as more and more polished and shiny tattoo brands emerge, more studios that are part of franchises, more formal apprenticeship course and schemes, more artists that are branded as part of sponsorship deals... I wonder—will this continually improving artform start to be seen by the world as having its shit together, as a well-oiled business rather than a messy not-for-profit-craft? What will this future bring from the hagglers and bargain-hunters of 21st century consumerism, from the way in which we continue to appreciate the roots of our art? Only time will tell, and in the meantime, you can follow in my footsteps when it came to the printing of my book—I couldn't afford it, so I didn't do it. ▣



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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 Iris Lys, the self-styled cattooer

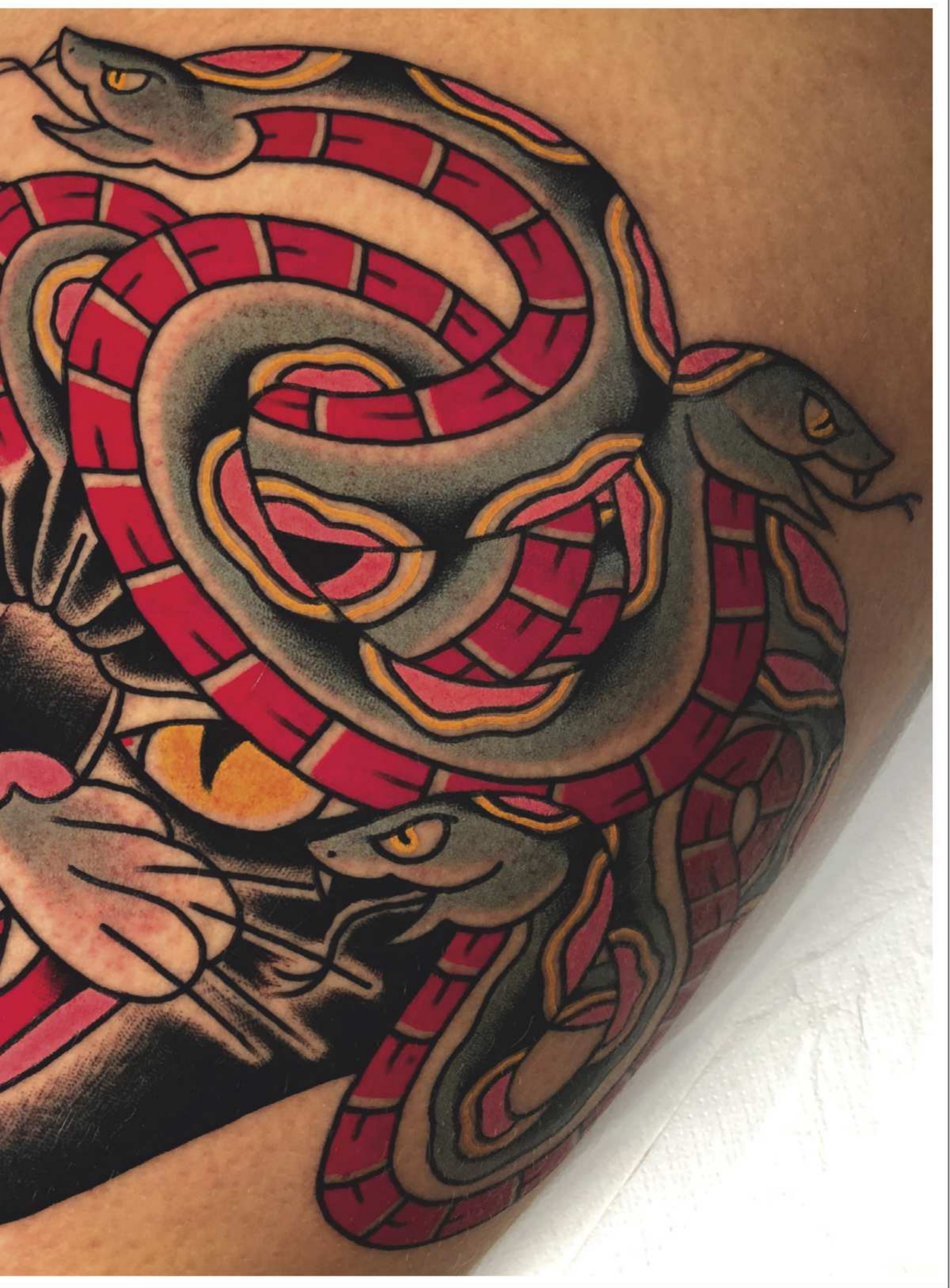
 iris_lys

September saw the release of Japanese author Genki Kawamura's *If Cats Disappeared From The World*. Now, being a guy who spends a good part of each day walking my own and other people's pooches, it would be fair to say I'm a dog person. In fact, this book wouldn't even have crossed my radar were it not for the bossman (also a dog person) blogging about it. But the premise is intriguing to say the least – our protagonist, after receiving some bad news from the doctor and only a few months to live, has a visit from the devil himself



**WHEN I REALISED
PEOPLE LIKED IT, I
THOUGHT CATTOOING
SHOULD BE MY THING**





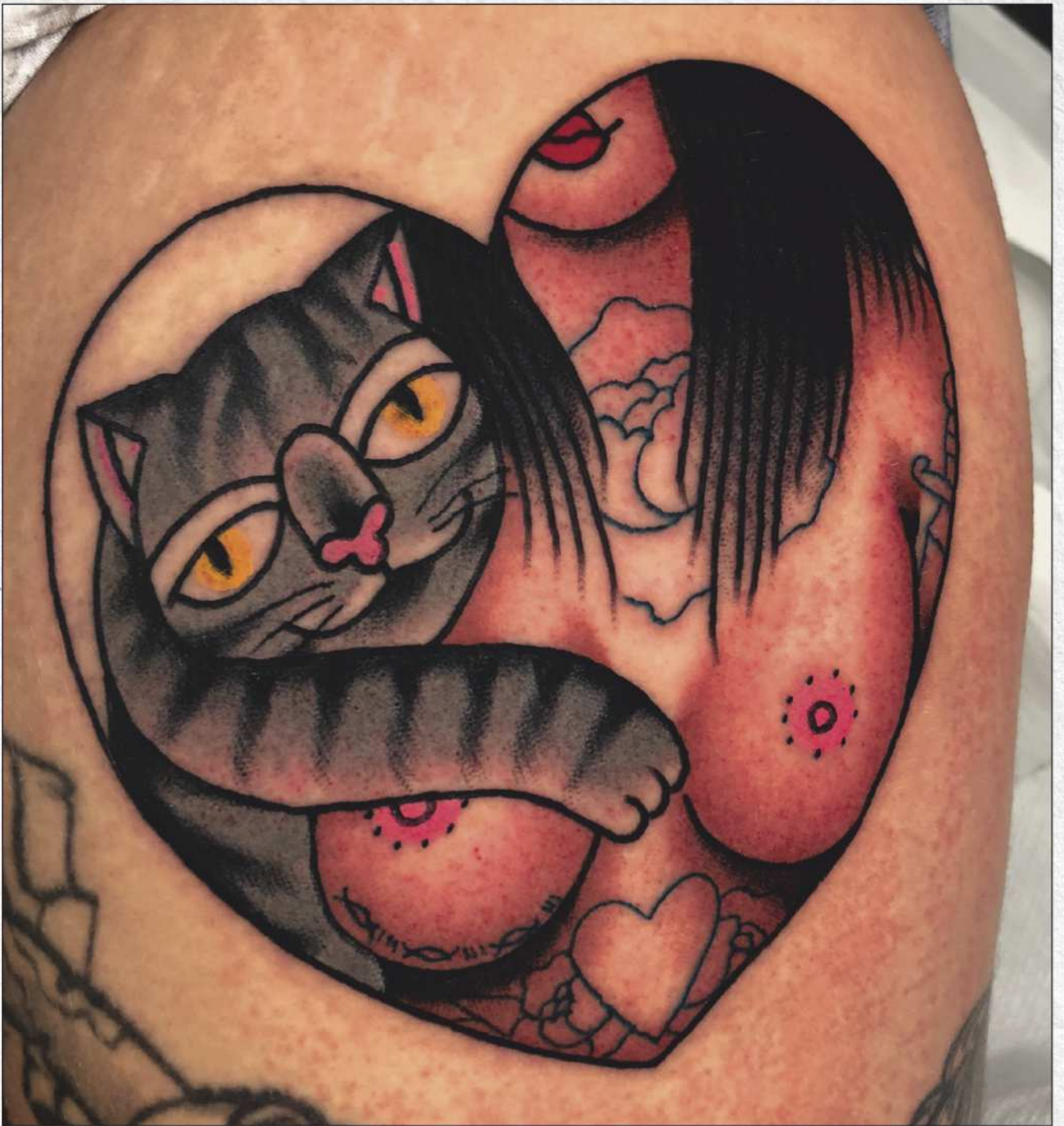


PEOPLE THINK IF THEY WERE TO ASK ME FOR SOMETHING ELSE I WOULD SAY NO, BUT THAT'S NOT TRUE

(possibly a dog person?) offering an extra day of life in exchange for making one thing in the world disappear. And by the looks of that title, it ain't good news for cat people.

Losing all the cats in the world would be something of a catastrophe for Iris Lys. Born to a French dad and Finnish mum, the self-styled 'cattooer' has spent the last four years making tattoos for a lot of cat lovers. "I have always been obsessed with cats," she tells me. "Where I grew up we had our own cats and stray cats hanging around all the time. I have three cats at home, now. My older one came from a shelter in Montreal and travelled with me when I moved. They all bring lots of love and inspiration into my life. When I am down they can feel it and get super close to me. They sleep with us every night. I feel like I have my own little family; it's like we have three kids I am totally crazy about!"

Iris first picked up a tattoo machine in Finland, thir-



teen years ago, but has since lived and worked in several different countries. Her cattooing was conceived in Montreal four years ago and has been something of a trademark ever since. “When I realised people liked it,” she says, “I thought cattooing should be my thing—which, to me, makes total sense.”

And so it should. With more studios than ever available to the discerning ink collector, tattoo artists are free to specialise in just about anything—so why not cattooing? Another tattooist, Helen Brown from Gung-ho in Birmingham, once told me she would be happy tattooing lady faces every day, so there’s no reason why Iris can’t do cats. And yet while proud to be the cat lady of the tattoo world, she will consider other things, too.

“People think if they were to ask me for something else I would say no, but that’s not true,” Iris points out. She

references a long list of familiar staples within tattooing, from the aforementioned lady faces right through to flowers and other animals, explaining how embracing diversity once in a while can take her out of her comfort zone. “Some people come to me more than once – at first, maybe, for a cattoo, but then they might come back for something different. I tell them not to be afraid to ask for something other than cats.”

What drew me to Iris’s work in the first place was how clean it is. Regardless of the subject matter, this is neo-trad done right—bold lines, colours that pop, designs that are not too busy. I’m interested to hear what’s important to her in the making of a tattoo.

“For me, it should always have strong lines, lots of black and some nice colours to make it jump out at you. I also like the fact that some of my tattoos make people laugh.



FOR ME, IT SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE STRONG LINES, LOTS OF BLACK AND SOME NICE COLOURS TO MAKE IT JUMP OUT AT YOU

I like to play on words, to draw kinky stuff—with a cat involved, of course!”

I love how playful Iris is with the cat theme – it seems befitting the muse, shall we say. We see cats featured in lots of different ways, many different metaphors going on. I ask what inspires her designs. Are they client-led or the result of ideas Iris herself comes up with?

“I guess I have a very creative mind,” she tells me. “My brain is always boiling with new ideas. Sometimes I see a vintage image that inspires me or a sign on the road somewhere. And sometimes people send me their own ideas, too, and I work with them. Ideas come from lots of things, in lots of different ways – it often depends on how I feel, what state of mind I am in, as to what I do with them.”

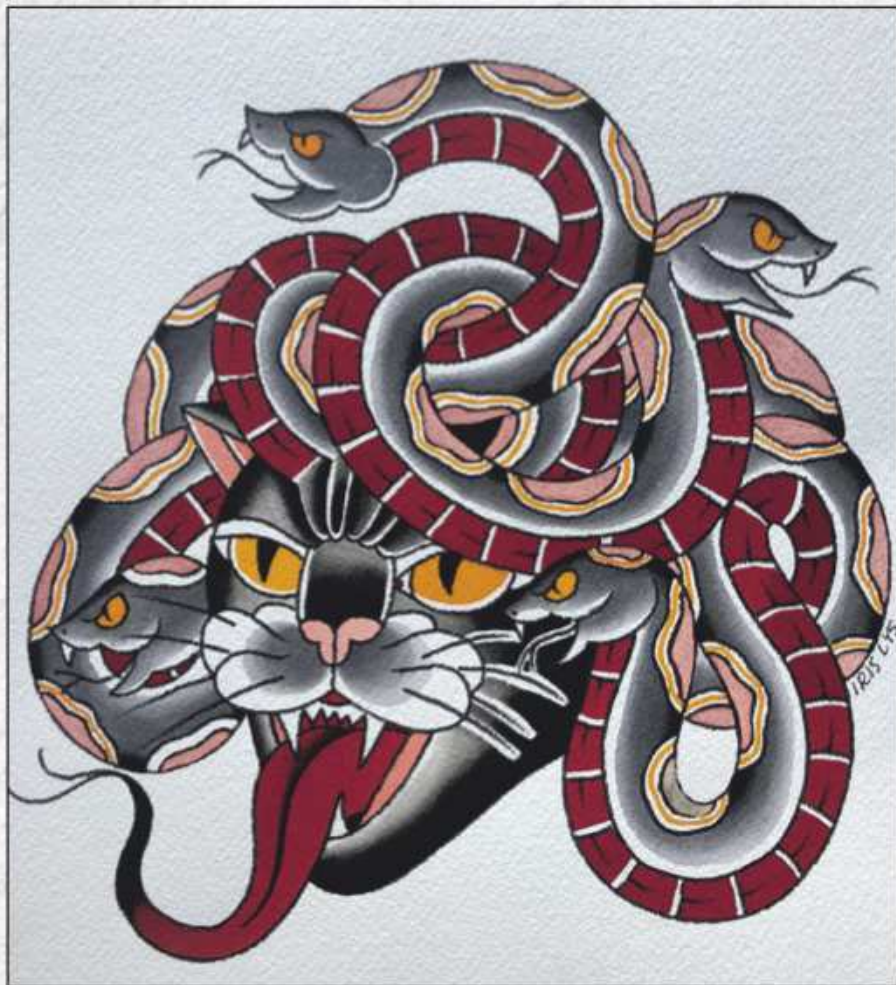
Iris has a penchant for taking old school flash from the likes of Bert Grimm, Sailor Jerry and Amund Dietzel and redrawing it in her own, definitive tattoo style. Some artists, particularly at the traditional end of the spectrum, may balk at that. But for Iris it’s about what satisfies her as an artist and, perhaps even more importantly, what makes her clients happy. When it comes to how the tat-



too is structured, whether the colour scheme used is compliant with traditional rules etc, it’s the person wearing the tattoo who should have the last say. “Tattoos aren’t always meant to mean something,” she points out. “People ask to have the same colours as their own cats and it’s just as important to listen to them, to make sure they’re happy with their tattoos.”

Moving forward, Iris has just announced she’ll be bringing her tattooing to the UK, working at The Foundry in Leeds, Tom Flanagan’s private shop, from December. She is also keen to work in other mediums, having experimented with wall murals within the last year or so. “I have always wanted to paint,” she tells me. “Most of the people I knew back in secondary school, including my younger brother, were into graffiti but I was too scared to try, so I’ve come to it pretty late in life. I think





I MYSELF AM PRETTY ALLERGIC TO A LOT OF THINGS, INCLUDING MY CATS, BUT I PREFER TO BLOW MY NOSE EVERY DAY THAN HAVE A HOUSE WITHOUT CATS

my graffiti style is too close to my tattooing style—I kind of do the same thing on walls that I do on skin—so I need to find the thing that will make my graffiti look more like graffiti. But every time I paint, I can see an improvement. I’m also meeting lots of people in the graffiti world and they’re giving me plenty of advice.”

As for the cats, they’ll always remain an important muse within Iris’s art. I sheepishly explain to her how I’m more of a dog person, how I’m actually allergic to cats and can’t be around them at all lest my eyes swell up and I start getting all wheezy. I wonder does that make me evil in her eyes, some kind of cat nemesis like the protagonist in that Genki Kawamura book.

“Not at all,” she laughs. “I myself am pretty allergic to a lot of things, including my cats, but there is no way I would get rid of them. I prefer to blow my nose every day than have a house without cats.” ▣

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FROM RUSSIA WITH STYLE

Russia seems to be in the news for all the wrong reasons lately, but take a step back, dig a little deeper and you'll find there are also plenty of great stories to be told. Stories about vibrant cities, amazing art and inspiring artists, like Moscow-based tattooer Jane Zimina whose mastery of black ink is out of this world

zema_zima

“**T**he first time I saw tattoos was on my grandfather,” recalls Jane Zimina. “These were classic army tattoos of naked mermaids and Russian churches. I could paint them all day with markers and pens—I just loved it,” she remembers fondly.

“I always liked drawing and, when I was a child, I often painted with colours on myself, my sister and my friends because I liked how the pictures came to life when a person moved.”

That love of seeing art on skin refused to fade and continued getting stronger until, finally, she decided to do something about it. Taking on an apprenticeship 2,000 miles away from home, her journey was anything but easy, but there was no doubt she was making the right decision.

“Tattoos, to me, were always something like magic—eternal and beautiful—containing in them stories and secrets,” she says. “So I moved to Novosibirsk to be an apprentice during one year and I had an excellent mentor in one of the best studios in Siberia. At first, I only drew a lot and made tattoos on bananas. Of course, I did not get money for it and it was a really difficult time, but it was necessary to gain experience.”

One of her biggest hurdles? “I was surprised by how heavy the coil machine was,” she laughs. “I could not understand how I could work with it! Now, it’s funny for me to remember that.”





CHASING DREAMS

With her apprenticeship behind her, Zimina made her way back to Moscow where she can now be found tattooing at her own studio. When she's not working as a guest artist in one of a slew of European shops, that is.

"Moscow is a huge city and there are a lot of strange people here, so it is very difficult for anyone to be surprised," she says when asked if inked individuals raise

eyebrows in Russia's capital. "But in other cities in Russia, people often look at tattooed children with caution and misunderstanding," she elaborates. "The older generation still believes that tattoos are for criminals."

When it comes to trends, Russians "like realism very much, especially colourful realism, but otherwise, trends are the same." That being said, despite colour's massive popularity, it's not something Zimina is drawn to. In fact, she relies exclusively on black and grey to bring her

The A5 zine has 28 pages and is matte printed. The first run of 50 copies has sold-out but Thomas is taking requests for re-prints – you can send him a direct message on Instagram or get in touch via email. He ships worldwide.



graphic designs to life.

“I was always inspired by book illustrations and medieval engravings—maybe that’s why I like black and grey drawings,” she reasons. “I make clear black tattoos with elements of engraving and thin lines. I am often inspired by Medieval and decaying aesthetics, so perhaps the mood of my tattoos is rather dark, but beautiful.”

“I love colour tattoos on other people, but not on me,” she adds. “I can probably say that black colour is the only constant for me. It’s the most readable colour. You may not like green or red, they may not combine well with your clothes or mood, but black—black is the constant and is fundamental.”

RUSSIAN REALITY

Speaking candidly about the realities of tattooing in Moscow, Zimina says there are definitely upsides—“It’s a big city and I get to meet a lot of talented and educated people, including many foreigners”—but admits that some of the misconceptions surrounding her home country have, at times, impacted her career.

“One day, my customer from Amsterdam confessed that he was afraid to come to me for the first time because he thought I might be drunk during the session,” she reveals. “Of course I was not drunk and my bear was indignant and even refused to play on his balalaika.”

“Also, people from other countries think that Russians are rude and angry, but it’s

JANE ZIMINA ON...HOW SHE UNWINDS

“I love to draw, not only for customers but also for myself. I also like playing sports and traveling. Lately, I’ve been traveling through small Russian cities with ancient temples and stunning nature.”



**JANE ZIMINA
ON...HOW MUCH
IS A TATTOO?**

"Many people think that a tattoo is painfully expensive. In general, yes. Instead of a tattoo... you can buy yourself the newest New Balance 574 sneakers... you can fly to Vorkuta... you can eat the whole month at McDonald's... In general, a lot of things can be purchased for this money, so I advise you to think twice if it's worth it or maybe [it'll be a trip to] Vorkuta after all?"

not true," she continues. "Most of us are friendly and have an open heart." Something she strives to show her clients while also taking something in return. "I love to learn something new from all of my customers and find with them common themes for dialogue," she adds.

Prejudice doesn't just come from abroad, however, as "the older generation does not take the profession of the tattoo artist as something serious. I would like that to change. I want people to understand that this is an art and must be treated with respect."

If you're beginning to think that a trip to Zimina's neck of the woods may be in order, she has some recommendations for the ultimate adventure. Hint: A lot of food will be involved.

"I advise you take a walk from the Bauman-

skaya metro station to the Luzhniki Stadium through all of the city centre," she starts. "Be sure to try Russian cuisine at the Pushkin restaurant, have steaks at Meat Puppets Bar & Meatarea, seafood at Boston Seafood & Bar, then try to eat as much as you can at the Danilovsky Market. You can still visit the old Russian manors, too. There are so many interesting things to do and see in Moscow!" she gushes of the city of 12 million.

Looking ahead, Zimina now wants to "take a long working trip, then start creating prints for unique T-shirts, which I want to sell in limited edition."

As for the most important question of all—Who is Jane Zimina?—the artist concludes: "Jane Zimina is a very kind person who likes to make people hurt... but more beautiful." □



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CHILD'S PLAY

Can you get tattooed whilst pregnant? What about when breastfeeding? Should you take children into tattoo shops? To conventions? Rebecca Givens talks tattoos and parenting with five different tattooists.

The acts of bringing a child into the world and getting a tattoo actually have a lot in common. They are both lifelong commitments, physically and mentally challenging, often unpredictable, quite terrifying but ultimately rewarding. These acts more often than not also endure the ubiquitous and often unwelcome opinions of others and can become potential minefields when navigating reliable information. When it comes to the separate topics of tattooing and parenting, there are multiple websites, blogs, magazines, books, events and people who want to tell you what you should and shouldn't do. In our modern age of information and opinion overload, quite often we find ourselves calling out for one single right answer, one single right thing to do.

Earlier this summer, when I found out that I myself was pregnant for the first time, I wasn't for a second concerned about any of the things I'd have to give up according to the official NHS guidelines. I don't really eat fancy cheese, I don't smoke, I rarely drink, I don't eat cold meats and am not going to be ordering a portion of shark anytime soon. In fact, the biggest detox I'd have to endure was a really long break from getting tattooed—something hadn't experienced in over ten years. I wasn't too upset about a potential break from my favourite hobby, but nevertheless the question still popped into my mind... WHY could I not get tattooed during this crucial period of my life? Did the information out there online mirror that of other pregnancy topics—would I find it contradictory, confusing and terrifying?

If you search 'tattoo' on the main NHS pregnancy and baby pages there are no results that bring the two topics together. This really surprised me considering that such a large percentage of the UK population has a tat-

too—(albeit now outdated) figures from various sources suggest 1 in 3 (young adults) and I'm convinced a more recent statistic would see an increase. I also couldn't find many pages that explored the effects of tattooing on the pregnant body rationally and realistically—most forums and online articles talked of "the risk of HIV", something which, when visiting a reputable, licensed and clean artist, wouldn't (or, shouldn't) ever be your main concern. Blood-borne diseases aside, why else shouldn't we be getting tattooed as pregnant women? What were the actual medical facts? How serious was it that this information wasn't explored by the national health service and not easily available from another reliable source? Should it be entirely the responsibility of the tattoo artist to inform? I'm not suggesting it would be easy or even necessarily a good thing for the industry to create reliable online guides about these topics. I am sure such an endeavour would not be a simple task and would require major consideration and research beforehand. For now, I will do the best I can for you.

When I have questions about tattoos and their impact on the human body (if I have a tattoo that's struggling to heal, for example), I default to experienced artists for help rather than my local medical practitioners who haven't necessarily studied tattoos in depth before. So, I went out to our community. This month, I spoke to five of my favourite tattooists (and where relevant, their partners) in order to share a snapshot of what the tattoo world thinks when it comes to these questions.

We present our opinions with all the usual disclaimers. These artists, myself, this magazine—we are not doctors, midwives, doulas or obstetricians, and no industry article on medical health should claim to hold such authority. Each pregnancy and each human body is different, and no



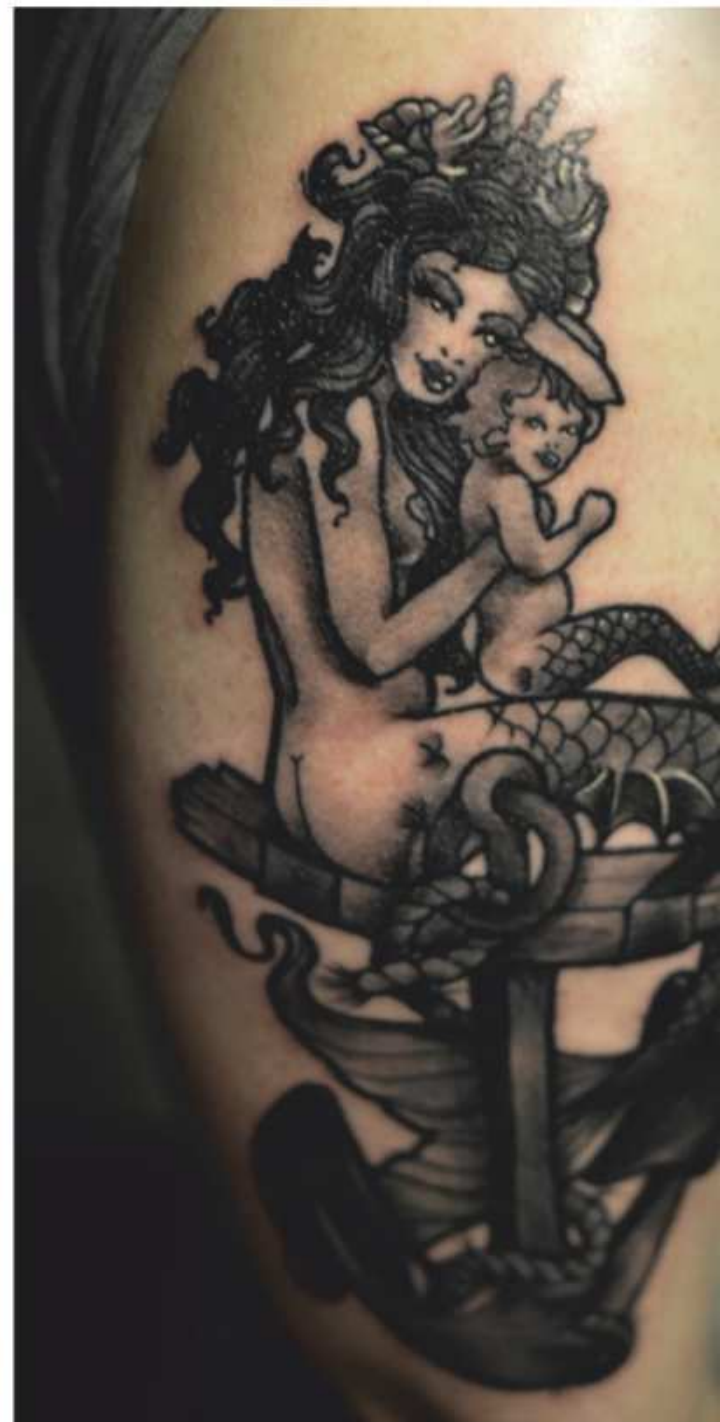


HANNYA JAYNE

Songbird Tattoo, Exeter
@hannyajaynetattoo

"It's important not to get tattooed during pregnancy..."

Whilst not a mother herself, Hannya has tons of experience with little ones, and as someone who has tattooed me multiple times, I personally find her knowledge and experience within the industry some of the most trustworthy, rational and practical out there. Out of the thousand of tattooists I've met over the years, she has remained my go-to person for honest tattoo advice.



advice should be generalised or acted upon without further consideration and advice from relevant parties. Let's open the magic box:

REBECCA GIVENS (RG): SHOULD A WOMAN GET TATTOOED WHILST PREGNANT?

HOLLIE MAY (HM): It is definitely not advisable to get tattooed whilst pregnant or breastfeeding—when it comes to pregnancy it is always best to err on the side of caution. The body changes a lot during pregnancy and can be more sensitive to certain things. There may be a higher risk of fainting and dizziness which could be dangerous due to the potential of falling. Due to the changes in your hormones it could be more painful for the pregnant lady and be difficult to heal. There must be loads of woman who have been tattooed whilst pregnant without knowing but as an artist I would never knowingly tattoo someone that is pregnant.

TONI MOORE (TM): In my opinion you shouldn't. Although they are small, there are risks with getting any tattoo (such as contracting an infection, which could go to your baby). Your body is going through so much already and the stress of getting tattooed would not be good for mum or baby. For me, when I was pregnant, getting tattooed was the last thing on my mind. Keeping my body relaxed and nutritious was my main focus. I would never tattoo someone who was pregnant.

HANNYA JAYNE (HJ): It's important not to get tat-

tooed during pregnancy. Everything you ingest (whether it's food, drink or even through your skin in the form of a moisturiser or cleaning fluids), is absorbed by your body, and ultimately passed to your baby. Some tattoo inks, although organic, do contain trace amounts of heavy metals, which would be undesirable to expose a developing baby to. Also, anyone who has been tattooed or pierced will recall those pre-appointment nerves—the raise in heart rate, the adrenaline production, the hormones associated with stress such as cortisol. Babies do respond to their mothers' raise in these stress levels. Lastly, sadly there are still some unprofessional tattooists operating who cut corners when it comes to hygiene and prevention of cross contamination—in these cases, there is the risk of contracting a bloodborne pathogen, such as hepatitis or HIV.

WILL GEE (WG): From my point of view as a tattoo artist—I don't tattoo pregnant women. Getting a tattoo is an invasive procedure and it takes your body to be at its best to sit through it and heal well. Opening up the skin always leaves it prone to infection—in the unlikely event of this happening, is that infection likely to spread or cause other unforeseen problems? And not every artist has the same level of hygiene when it comes to tattooing. Also, when you're pregnant, your body is building a person—there are so many things you can't do, or are advised not to do, and these things may be annoying because you feel fine, but a tattoo is forever, and you have the rest of your



life to get the tattoo. Having Willow wasn't an easy journey for us and we had to go through a lot to finally get to have her—if anything could have affected the pregnancy, we steered away from it.

LAURA GEE (LG): Pregnancy is HARD! Each trimester brings new challenges and that's just for a straightforward pregnancy, never mind a pregnancy with complications, challenges and conditions that may occur. The human body is capable of incredible things, most of all, creating life. Pregnancy is a gift. Why put extra strain on your body's system? Whilst you're growing a finger, you don't want your body thinking about a foreign substance you've had injected into your body, you want it to focus on making that little finger.

COLIN DALE (CD): Whilst I would recommend against it, I have tattooed a handful of women during pregnancy with no problem. It might not be advisable for the first months or for a first-timer as hormones and stress can be unpredictable. I believe in everything in moderation. I don't think a glass of red wine is going to hurt the baby either, but a couple of bottles or a glass on a daily basis is certainly not the best choice. Similarly, a whole back-piece or long tattoo sessions is not be advisable, as your body will be under stress and using its energy on healing rather than growing your baby. I tattooed Nanna's forearm when she was 4 months pregnant, while in Tahiti. She has had more than one child and many tattoos—she doesn't get stressed and generally falls asleep while getting tattooed.

RG: CAN YOU GET A TATTOO WHILST BREAST-FEEDING?

TM: I definitely wouldn't rush into getting tattooed after having a baby but everyone is different and obviously tattooing is a very personal thing. When breastfeeding, your body is going through so much. You use more energy and need to eat more calories when you are breastfeeding compared to when you are pregnant! Getting tattooed on top of this is just going to put a huge strain on your body and affect your milk. I found breastfeeding difficult, it's not something that comes easy to every mother, so giving your body time to adapt and being kind to your body and mind is key—I love tattooing but it doesn't fall into the category of being relaxing. It can take a long time for your body and hormones to settle after having a baby—as long as 18 months after breastfeeding. There can be a lot of different information online so anyone wanting to know more should ask their doctor or midwife.

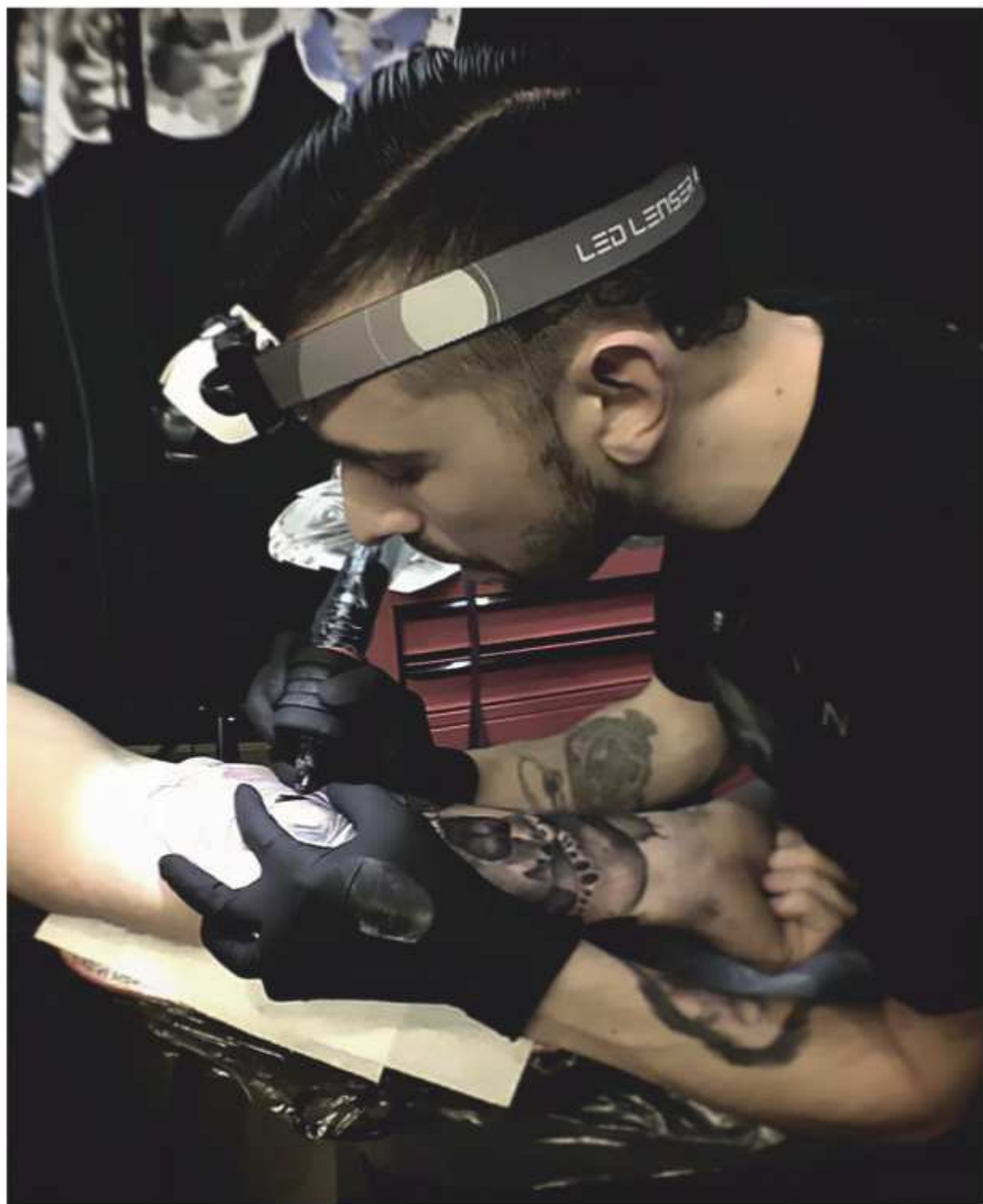
HM: Again, I personally would advise against it. It could be fine, but I think it is best to be careful. Why take the risk? Plan the next tattoo for after you have finished breastfeeding—enjoy pregnancy and parenthood and don't take any unnecessary risks. A tattoo that is with you for life is worth waiting a year or two for, to ensure the safety of yourself and your child.

CD: I tattooed Nanna's second forearm a few years later whilst she was breastfeeding Loki. Again this was done without a machine so it was much less intrusive on the body. If someone is stressed about tattooing it might affect the milk, but I've heard of more people being affected by strawberries than by tattooing when breastfeeding.

WG: Your body is recovering from having a baby and is now needing to provide it with food and nutrients—again, the body needs to be running at optimal. For a lot of women this is a very tiring time and can be painful too. I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like but I think the last thing I would want to do is have a tattoo that I then also had to care for.

LG: This is something that is more frequently asked for and individuals tend to be shocked with the response

WILL GEE
“SOME PEOPLE
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of ‘No’. Depending on where you are in the process of breastfeeding, it would be the last thing on my mind. If still establishing it, you can be attached to your baby for 8 hours a day or more. It’s tiring, and sleep deprivation and being tattooed don’t go hand-in-hand. After having a baby, whilst breastfeeding, as a new mum, you can be at your most vulnerable—tired, emotional, adjusting to your new life as a fresh parent. In the later stages of breastfeeding, my argument would be the same as Will’s—your body is making food for someone else, you need to be on top form. Loads of things can disrupt your milk supply, why waste energy on having and healing a tattoo?

HJ: The standard advice for getting tattooed whilst breastfeeding is—wait until you have finished breast feeding, or your six week check, whichever is later. You will pass on anything you ingest to your baby through your breast milk.

RG: As a mum-to-be and a tattoo enthusiast, I am already thinking about how I can introduce my child to tattooing. What are your thoughts on children being in studios and learning about our industry?

HJ: Every tattooist is different when it comes to allowing children in the studio. Check with the studio or artist prior to visiting. Tattoo studios have changed greatly over the last 10 years or so, becoming much more friendly and welcoming, but they are still an adult environment. When tattooing or getting tattooed, a calm environment is paramount, and the sound of a baby crying isn’t conducive to being able to concentrate. Some previous studios I’ve worked in, I had enough space for people to bring their

baby in and I was happy for them to do so, as long as they brought someone else with them to be on-hand for any baby-related duties. It always makes for fun memories to share when the child is older. I think with tattoos being so commonplace these days, kids will have familiarity with tattoos on their parents and on telly—something our generation didn’t.

WG: As a family man, I wanted a studio where my family can be. The tattooing area and the rest of the studio are completely separate. Layla will be in the studio sometimes, reading a book for example, but she hasn’t ever stepped foot into the tattoo area. Every studio, layout and artist is different. I personally don’t mind kinds in the front of the studio if someone is popping in for a quick consultation or to drop off a deposit, if they are well behaved. The parents have to understand that they must be calm, quiet and abide by the shop rules. I wouldn’t ever have a kid in the studio all day. One night a year, we close the studio down for tattooing, remove everything (clinical waste and precious ornaments) and we do stick-on tattoos for kids from the local area. It’s a really cool evening, the kids and parents fill out consent forms, we wear gloves, ask if it hurt and pretend it’s a real tattoo experience for them. The kids are always fascinated by their parents’ tattoos and having a stick-on for them is like joining in—more often than not, that’s all kids want to do.

LG: Talking is the best way to educate your child about tattooing. The most important thing for me is that Layla and Willow understand the permanence and commitment of tattoos. If they are eventually interested in be-



LAURA & WILL GEE

Monsters Art Emporium,
Tavistock
@whoswillgee

"The human body is capable of incredible things, most of all, creating life. Pregnancy is a gift..."

Multi award-winning tattooist Will and his wife Laura have two children - Layla is 7 years old and new arrival Willow was born a few weeks before this article went to print. Hats off to them both for giving us this interview time despite their recent sleepless nights! Welcome to the world, Willow!

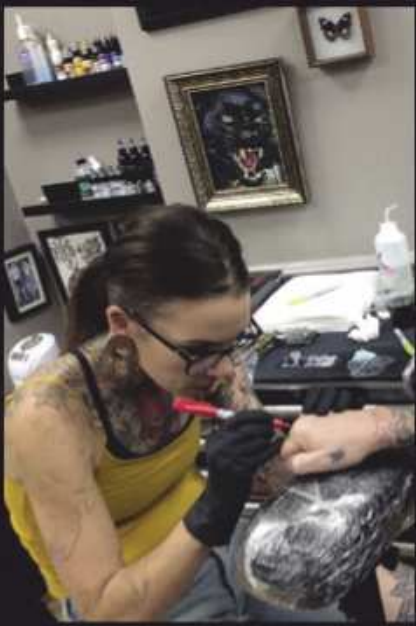


coming tattooists, they'll have to go through the mill like everyone else.

TM: My little girl obviously comes to my shop with me whilst I'm not working. We never stay too long as she's interested in EVERYTHING, and I don't want her in the way of my artists or clients. I understand not everyone likes kids or wants to have one making noises whilst they are trying to relax or concentrate. I don't think a studio is the best place for kids at all—there are too many things they can't play with!

CD: Tattooing in most cultures is a rite of passage to commemorate stages in one's life—passage from child to adult (which would be attended by the whole family), marking the birth of a child (which would see the child present). In a studio, children can be a distraction, especially if a tattoo is over many hours, as they get bored. Loki has always had a place at the studio after school to draw, watch films,

etc. but if he gets bored and is a distraction he will also be asked to leave. During annual events near our studio, we open for 'children's tattooing'—we have an old barber chair and old machines that I've renovated to hold Sharpies instead of needles—the kids climb up in the chair and get all the sights and sounds (and fear) of getting a real tattoo. They walk away just as proud as any naval cadet back in the day! I had a client who contacted me about giving him a hand-poked dragon tattoo on his 18th birth-



TONI MOORE

Forever Bound Tattoo, Bristol
@tonitattoos

"Everyone is different and obviously tattooing is a very personal thing..."

Business owner and tattooist Toni opened her new studio this year, and Forever Bound is now home to some exceptional UK artists. She describes being pregnant as "the most amazing experience" and has one daughter, Indiana, who was born in February 2017.

day—turns out I did a Sharpie tattoo of a dragon on him at the event 15 years earlier and he still remembered it!

HM: Lottie and Dexter are very involved in our tattoo world. We are a very family-friendly studio and are lucky enough to have a separate waiting area so when the children do visit they can be in the studio without disturbing the artists or being at risk. We participate in some local events that encourage families into the studio (waiting area) and enable children to see that a tattoo studio isn't always a scary place to be! We are working hard in our local community and on social media to help break down those typical stereotypes and stigmas associated with tattooing. We have just sponsored the outdoor stage at a local festival and had a special area for the kids where they could get glitter tattoos and colour-in designs. Being involved in these events helps break down those barriers and allows people to educate their children about tattoos. There are also some conventions that are family friendly—Tattoo Freeze is always a good one for the kids. Having our children involved in the tattoo world gives them creative inspiration—both of our children have their own portfolios at the front of the studio. Lottie has already had her designs tattooed on me and a couple of others. Recently, both Matt and myself had one of Dexter's original designs tattooed—he has stories for all of his designs, like the slug who looks sad but is happy! We hope this exposure to the industry will encourage them to be open minded and diverse, to accept everyone, despite their appearance, and have social confidence. I hope tattooing will also show my daughter that females do not have to dress like princesses and can succeed in a more male-populated industry.





TONI MOORE

“GIVING YOUR BODY TIME TO ADAPT AND BEING KIND TO YOUR BODY AND MIND IS KEY —I LOVE TATTOOING BUT IT DOESN'T FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF BEING RELAXING.”

TALKING TO THESE FIVE TATTOOISTS has been extremely insightful and reminded me that each individual tattoo session is different and every single pregnancy and its aftermath is different too, for each different woman and her family. Some women could deal with the pain and healing of a tattoo well, and some could not. As with all topics in tattooing, I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all answer. Some women breastfeed for weeks, some for years. Tattooing methods, inks, approaches and environments vary, and as with many potential risks in pregnancy (like drinking alcohol, using jacuzzis and eating particular types of fish), there are various and contradicting viewpoints, sets of data, trial results, opinions and approaches.

I personally found all the warnings and scare-stories overwhelming and anxiety-inducing in the first few months of my pregnancy. I hated being constantly told I was vulnerable and at risk—all I wanted was to feel relaxed, confident, strong and actually enjoy my pregnancy. It's a very difficult balance for a pregnant woman to be aware of risks yet not get bogged-down in these possible negative outcomes—I've come to learn that keeping good mental health is just as important as keeping good physical health, yet we always seem to focus on the former.

I understand, however, that precautions and warnings are there for a reason.

Also, often with these subjects, the statistics are very hard to decipher—if there is a problem in pregnancy, how do you



HOLLIE MAY “PARENTHOOD IS THE BEST THING I’VE EVER DONE... BECOMING A MUM GAVE ME A NEW LEASE OF LIFE AND HELPED WITH MY CREATIVITY.”

analyse the cause? How easy is it to marry up decision and consequence? When we are surveyed for medical research, how honest and reliable are we in remembering and wanting to admit what we put into our bodies? Rather than make sweeping statements based on limited and unreliable research, our medical professionals and sensible tattooists can only ask us to err on the side of caution, and to protect our babies in any way they can. I feel we are so lucky to have that.

There was a turning point for me in realising how unprepared my own pregnant body would be for a potential tattoo. Sometimes, as a pregnant woman and new mum, you can feel brilliant but be blissfully unaware of the work your body is doing behind the scenes. I felt amazing for the first few weeks of my pregnancy and was astounded that, when I contracted a cold (despite sleeping, eating and feeling great), it took over three weeks for symptoms to even begin to shift—normally I’d see an improvement in a few days. This was a reality check for me in noticing how incredibly down my immune system was—I had absolutely no reserves and didn’t know this beforehand. Prior to my snotty epiphany, I would have probably felt OK to get tattooed, perhaps even committed to a small hand-poke tattoo from an artist I felt comfortable with. As my pregnancy has progressed and my returning cold not shifted, I have really felt the physical strain of this journey, and I realise that I may not have thanked the trauma of a new tattoo at all. I’ve started to really feel the work my body is doing, and has done already, and I’m glad I allowed my first

trimester to be focused on just growing my baby and nothing else. Because we can’t see him, we can forget about the mini human that is zapping all of our energy, that is actually affecting all sorts of things that we’re not even aware of (“hormones affect pretty much everything!” admits Hannya). I’m glad it was just a mild cold virus and not a new tattoo that brought me back down to earth again.

Would I get tattooed whilst breastfeeding? I was previously undecided. Knowing other women who have done this and been fine had previously swayed me, but I think one important fact sets the record straight: it’s easy to face the responsibility of taking care of ourselves, to think about our own energy levels, healing abilities and peace of mind—one of the things I have learnt whilst being pregnant is that parents are free to make their own decisions about pregnancy and the aftermath and not be judged by others. I’ve most certainly not been entirely staying away from all of the things I’ve been told to stay away from. I’ve felt in control of my own body and think I have had the intelligence to know what feels right, and what doesn’t. To not panic when I forget to wash my salad. Each pregnant woman deserves to set her own standards and not be judged and enjoy her pregnancy without worrying about every little thing. I still stand by all of that.

And yet, here is the big ‘but’... I am no longer just responsible for ME. Every decision I make as a pregnant woman or new parent has a consequence for another human being who is not yet able to make choices. Making a decision

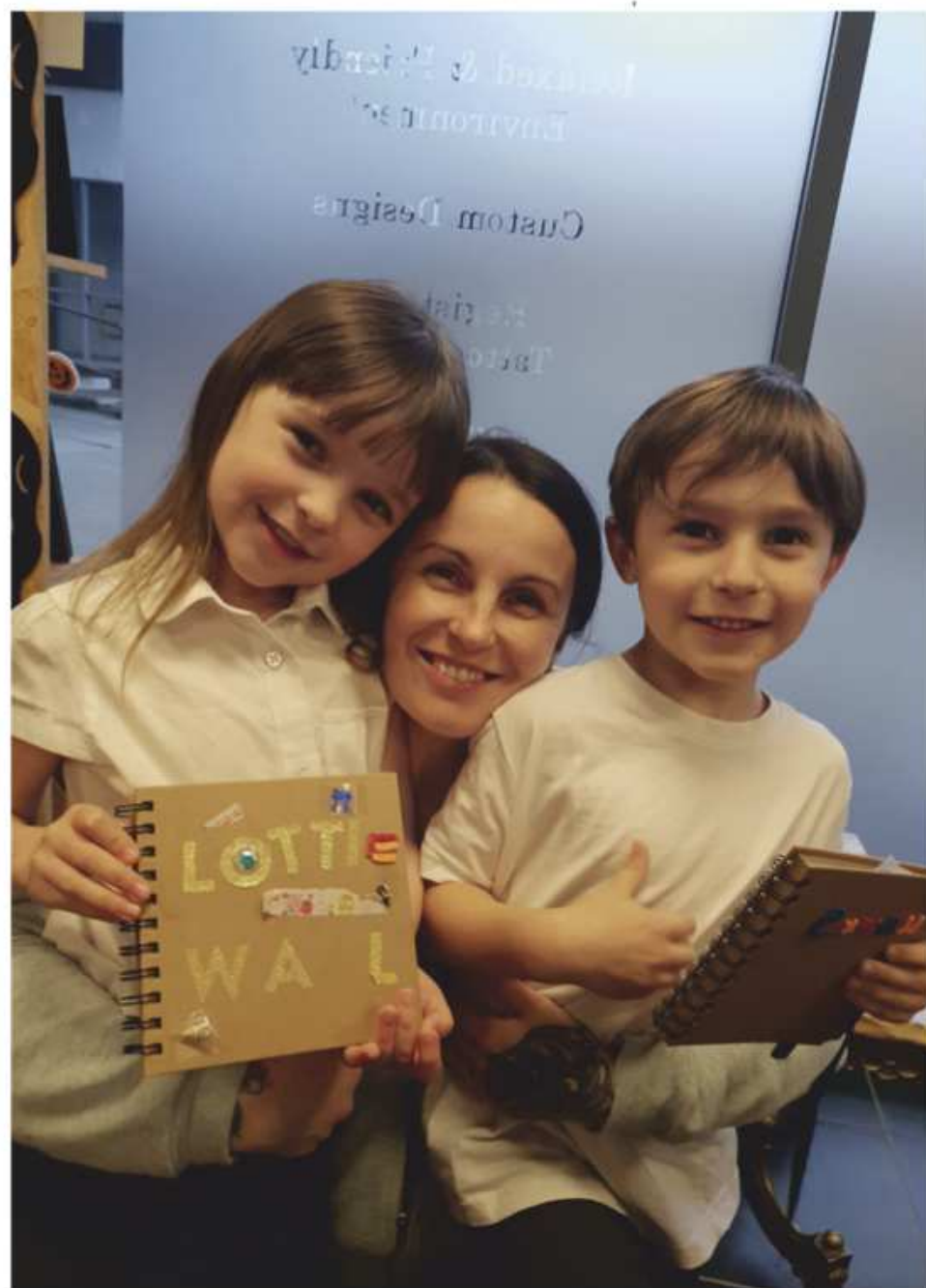


HOLLIE MAY
Old Smithy Tattoo, Leek
@holliemaytattooist

"Enjoy pregnancy and parenthood and don't take any unnecessary risks..."
Owner of Old Smithy Tattoo, Hollie is known for breaking boundaries when it comes to her vibrant tattoo style. She and her husband Matt live in Leek with their two children, Lottie (7) and Dexter (5). She refers to parenthood as "the best thing I've ever done... becoming a mum gave me a new lease of life and helped with my creativity."

for yourself and facing the consequences for yourself is easy. Taking steps that affect another who cannot have a say yet, is a much more difficult situation, and I have come to realise, this makes my decision-making much more complicated. Also, it's one thing to accidentally eat too much fish in a week or drink a small glass of wine, but I think it's another entirely to book a tattoo appointment and subject your body, immune system, hormones and bloodstream to what can be a lengthy, challenging and demanding process, physically and mentally. Often society and the media can underestimate how invasive the tattooing process actually is—I think our artists discouraging us from getting tattooed whilst potentially vulnerable is nothing less of a godsend in an industry often calling out for better information, regulation and education.

In terms of children finding their place in an adult-led industry, I began researching this article with a prior opinion that I couldn't wait to see my child engaging with the tattoo world—accompanying me to conventions and hopefully asking mummy about her tattoos. Whilst talking to these knowledgeable artists over the last few months, my belly has grown bigger, it's started to move and the startling presence of another person separate from myself has become real. For some, this reality doesn't hit until the child has born, but for me, I am now much more aware of this individual as its own entity. If he doesn't want to be interested in tattoos, that's absolutely fine, and who am I to encourage that interest, or expect





COLIN DALE

Skin and Bone,
Copenhagen, Denmark
@colindaletattoo

*"I believe in everything
in moderation..."*

Machine-free wizard Colin was part of our recent feature on Copenhagen's best tattoo artists. He and his partner Nanna are parents to children from previous marriages, and newest to the tribe is their son, Loki. Colin utilises hand-poke methods which means his method of tattooing with hand-made tools and no electricity is often considered much more gentle.



COLIN DALE TATTOOING IN MOST CULTURES IS A RITE OF PASSAGE TO COMMEMORATE STAGES IN ONE'S LIFE.

him to experience this world without his prior consent? I have to wait for his free will to be up and running before I begin to answer any of these questions, before I anticipate him finding joy in what is my hobby, not his. I want him to design his own life, not be influenced by my expectations.

Speaking of free will, we must acknowledge the other important two people in all of these decision-making processes. Firstly, your artist, who has the free will to decide whether to tattoo you or not—it is a commitment for them just as it is for you, and as a pregnant or breast-feeding woman, you have no right to demand such a thing from a tattooist who does not consent to it.

As Will perfectly puts it, "some people feel that we're service providers but that is not the case, and in any situation, if you're asking the tattoo artist to partake in a procedure they aren't comfortable with, they have the right to say no".

Yes, this is my body, but this is their craft, their livelihood, their peace of mind. If the tattoo brings me or my child any trauma, they suffer the consequence as much as I do. Secondly, as the casing which houses our unborn child, we can often forget as women that there is often a third family member whose opinion deserves to be respected. I approached tattooists for their advice before consulting my own husband and I have a lesson to learn from that. Our partners have thoughts about what is best for their child too and we must adhere to their wishes as much as our own.

In terms of national medical advice, is one, succinct set of guidelines what we really need? Most of the artists I spoke to agreed that there was a lack of accessible information out there but also agreed that the answer was simple, and that a good healthcare professional would no doubt advise the expecting mother to stay away from tattoos. Their priority is always to keep your baby safe. No matter what contradictory research or anecdotal stories exist with regards to drinking alcohol, eating lots of fish, sleeping on your back, or whatever... the NHS will default to advising against it, just to be safe. And that is a good thing—they're only looking out for us and our future generations. The other problem we face is that tattooing is also still distanced from the medical world. If some medical professionals aren't completely understanding, emerged



in and accepting of this industry, do we run the risk of judgement being passed on tattooing? Could the worse-case-scenario you-might-get-HIV articles ruin it for the good-practicing portion of our progressive craft? Hannya Jayne agrees, and if our worlds were to join forces, “would pregnant women actually have access to factual, unbiased advice?” When I began writing this article, I thought some additional pages on the NHS website could be a huge step forward, and perhaps that’s correct, but I don’t think this is something that should be done hastily and without the right named industry leaders, consultation and research.

Writing this article has been a journey for me, and so is becoming a parent for anyone who does so. If you’re expecting a child or even considering bringing a person into the world in the future, know that it’s completely unpre-

dictable every step of the way. In just the last few weeks, I’ve gone from feeling great, to feeling crap. From being able to bend over, to not being able to see my feet. From missing tattooing, to thinking about it less and less. From feeling spontaneous and impulsive, to wanting to stay at home and clean. Things I swore I’d be OK to do, actually made me feel like shit. Things I said I was OK with, I realised I was actually not. I underestimated how much this journey would change, not just my life, but me as a person.

As hundreds of other things remain uncertain around me—how I will give birth, what it will feel like, who my child will become, what he will be interested in... very few things remain indisputable, and they are encompassed in Toni Moore’s wise words: “pregnancy goes so fast—enjoy every minute of it, tattooing can wait.” ▣



TWINS OF SALEM

@ryanmurray @mattwmurray

The inseparable twin brothers Ryan and Matt Murray of Salem, Massachusetts are uncanny in their ability to simulate a reflection wherever they go and with whatever they touch. They travel through life like one unified vessel, living and working together, dressing alike, and tattooing in a manner whereby it is near impossible to tell who made what...

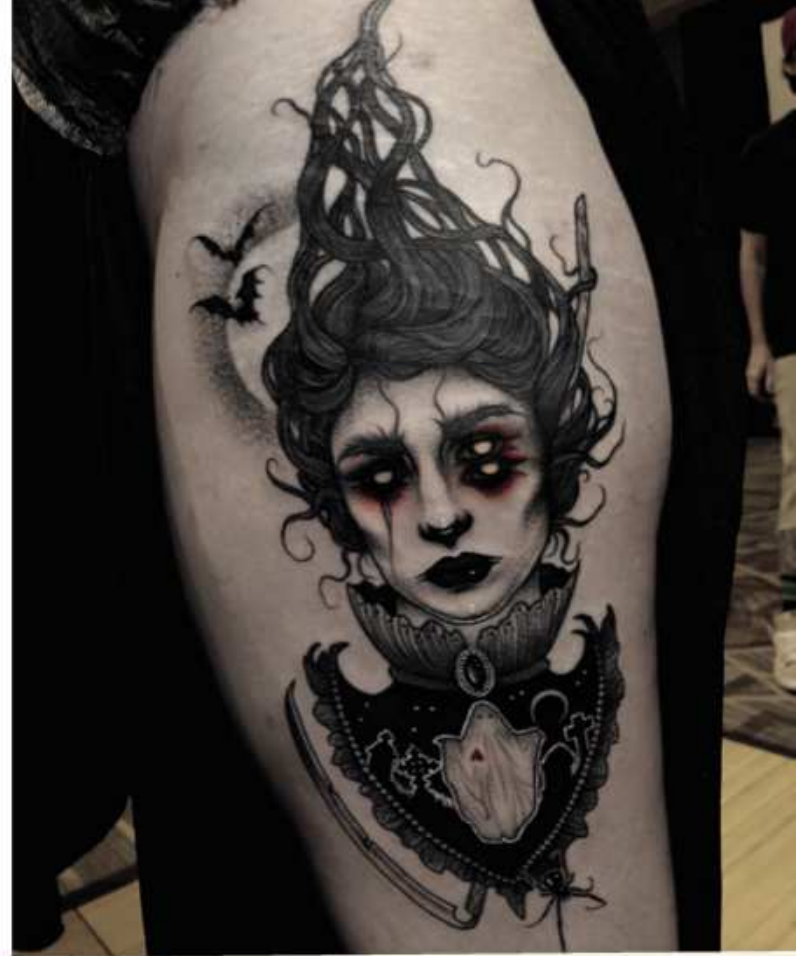
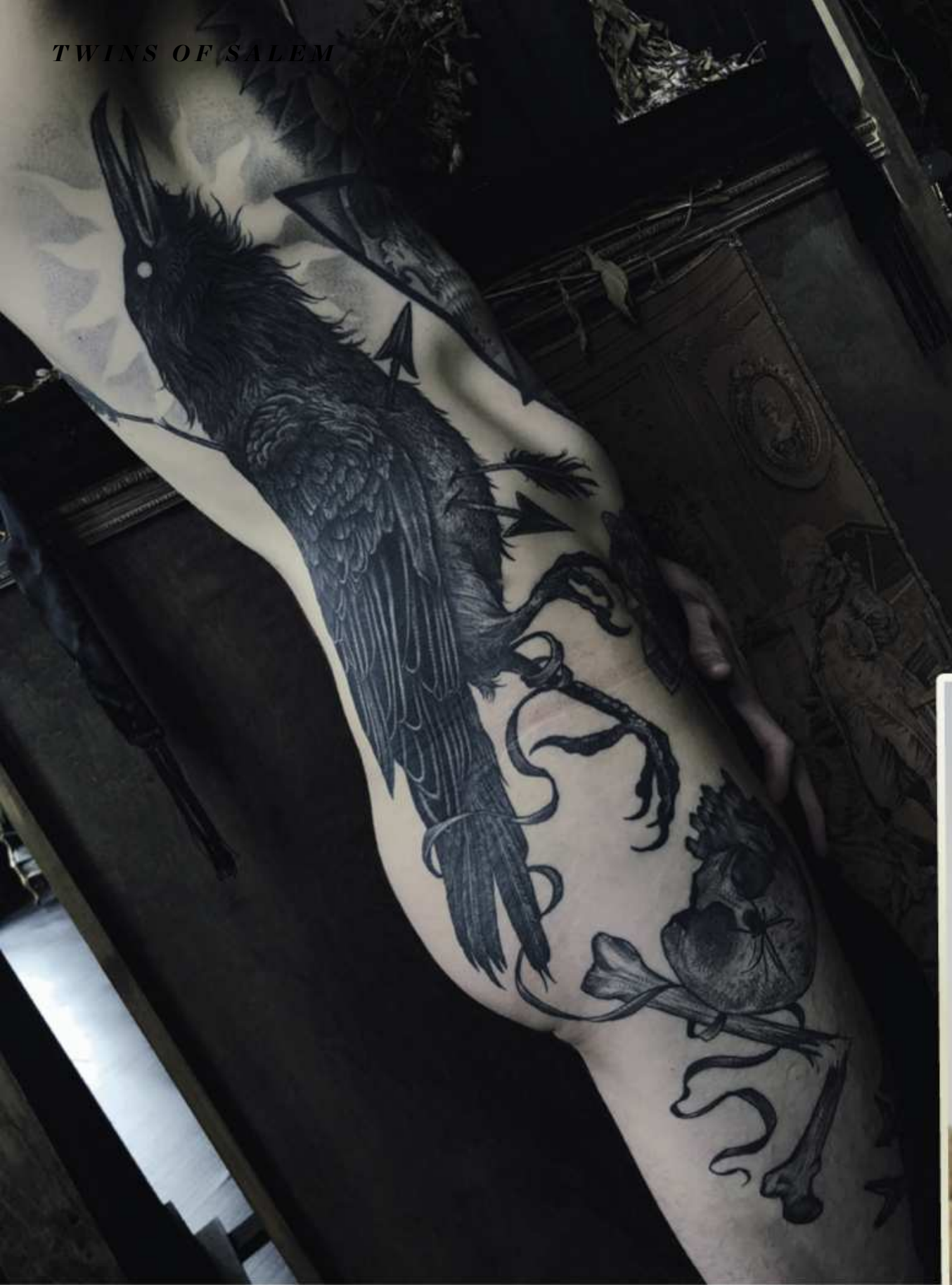
They wholeheartedly embrace their brotherly connection, a close bond where one truly completes the other. Each brother shares an admiration for the gothic aesthetic; both working out of their shop Black Veil Tattoo in Salem, a city that is so closely tied to witchcraft and the occult that its mere name permeates our collective psyche. It is clear that the cultural landscape in which they reside and tattoo informs much of their work, which interestingly creates new questions to whether the production of tattoos can be knowingly or subconsciously influenced by environmental factors. A love for the supernatural and the macabre runs deep in their veins, tattooing is not only a process that strengthens their resolve as twins but also attempts to explore the fine veil that hangs between this life and the next. Their tattoos acknowledge the short temporality of life, strikingly representing the love, death, and

tragedy that life can deal. Those tattooed by the brothers are drawn into their familial circle, spiritually tied to the roots of Salem, where existence is regularly challenged by the otherworldly.

You work with your identical twin brother at your shop Black Veil Tattoo in Salem, Massachusetts, how did you both realise you had a passion and skill for tattooing?

Ever since we were children we've always had a fascination and shared a passion for drawing/painting and all other forms of art. Ryan began his tattooing career in 2009; meanwhile Matthew attended classes as a film major at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston but soon came into the industry while apprenticing with Ryan while still in school. The Black Veil opened its doors in April of 2012 with works self-described as "black and grey for the grim hearted".

Words: Steven Guichard-Kenny



IN OUR OPINION WE'VE BECOME MUCH STRONGER ARTISTS HAVING ONE ANOTHER TO RELY ON THAN WE WOULD HAVE BEEN IF WE WERE WORKING ON OUR OWN

When looking at your collected tattoo work it is near impossible to tell the difference between both of your techniques, linework and style, did you consciously decide to tattoo in a similar manner, or was the process more organic?

Over time our styles and skills have organically grown and developed with one another, we love to learn and feed off of each other's techniques as well as concepts and ideas. Consistency is something that we've also always consciously strived for since we were children and has carried over into our adult careers. Through this it's become very difficult for others to distinguish whose artwork belongs to whom. We love that we're able to work together and help one another on a daily basis. In our opinion we've become much stronger artists having one another to rely

on than we would have been if we were working on our own. Not every artist has the luxury of working at their best friend/brother's side so for this we are extremely fortunate and grateful for. Our tattoos are not the only aspect in our lives that are difficult to decipher. Other than just tattooing we also live together, have the same circle of friends, and we always dress almost identical, something that has also carried over since early childhood.

The content of your work is haunting, featuring startling images of the occult; monstrous and demonic, what draws you to this type of imagery?

We've always found ourselves drawn to the darker aspects of life, death and the macabre. For us there has always been elements of immense beauty to be found there, and it has always seemed to wrap us up and hold us close. Our artwork draws very heavy influences from the death and mourning etiquette of New England's Victorian past times, as well as the energy and history of our home, Sa-



lem, Massachusetts. Our illustrations manifest a deep fascination for capturing a glimpse through the keyhole of a veil between two worlds.

Salem is steeped in the cultural history of witchcraft and the occult; does working in such a place feed into your inspirations for your tattoo designs?

The history of Salem and our immense love for the city manifests a vast inspiration for all of the artwork that we create. Everything that we make is in some way intended to have a feeling or specific ode to it, for us it's a city full of magic and memories that comes with a certain nostalgia that we will never be able to stray from. We like to keep that as apparent as possible in our work because it makes us who we are. We also have a lot of family history here so it's also our way of digging our feet into the soil and declaring this as the place we call 'home'.

I notice from your Instagram that you are both keen travellers. What has been the most haunting place you have visited?

We have always both shared a love for travel and exploration, for most of our travels we focus on visiting locations that we have either an interest in hiking or for any supernatural or abandoned structures. One of the most haunting places that we've visited in the past was an abandoned tuberculosis hospital for children on a dreary shoreline in Connecticut. The inside still displayed weathered children's decals, a piano and broken stairwells, you can feel the energy through the wings of the massive hospital. We have also recently visited the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado. The Stanley opened in 1909 and is nothing short of incredible with its charm and history of paranormal phenomena. It's most famous for its notorious visit by author Stephen King, where his strange occurrences



OUR ILLUSTRATIONS MANIFEST A DEEP FASCINATION FOR CAPTURING A GLIMPSE THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF A VEIL BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

and nightmare took place that would later inspire his best selling novel *The Shining*.

You tattoos direct our gaze to the morbid and uncanny elements of the world around us. Can a fascination with death lead us to living more fulfilling lives?

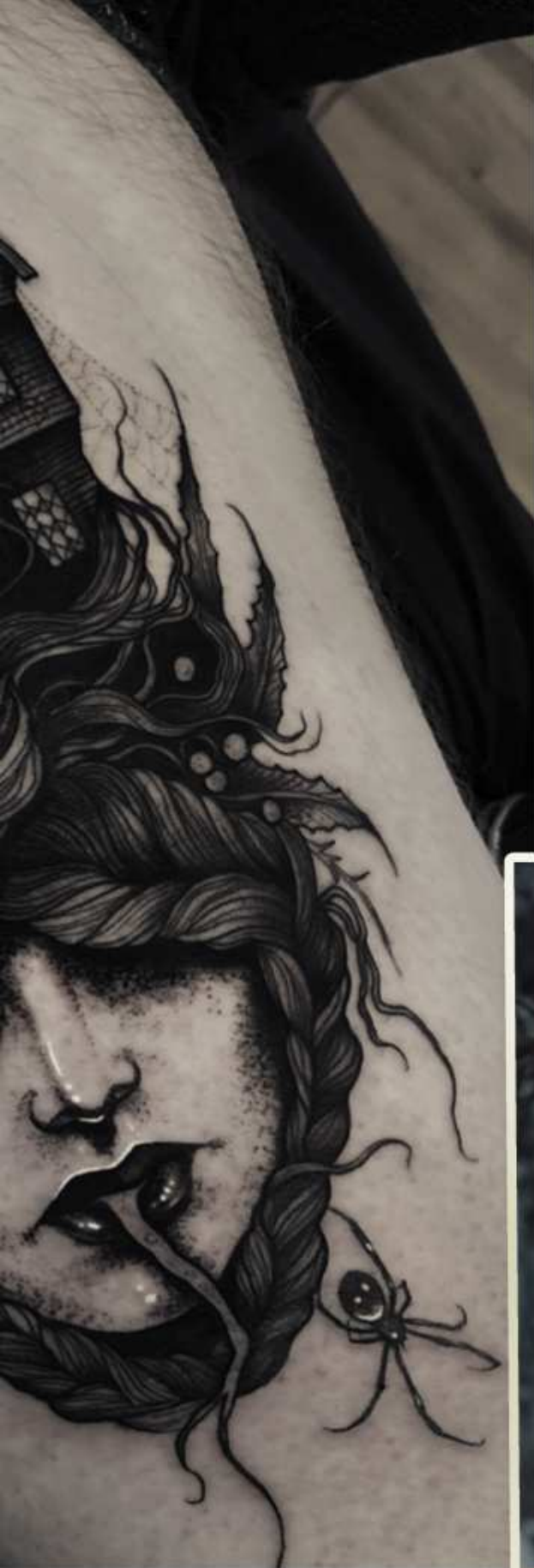
We've always found ourselves following the darkness, there's a certain romanticism about walking hand in hand to your inevitable doom. We believe that somewhat embracing death could remedy the notion to never take what we have for granted, to take each day as a gift and to cherish the ones you love. We are all here for a short period of time and life, love, death, and tragedy each play their own roles.

Many of your tattoos are iconic for their characteristic small black widow spider, where did this idea stem from?

Almost all of our work is marked with our matching black widow spider, it was not only adopted to manifest a glimpse of horror within our artwork, but to also signify an unbreakable bond between our kindred style as twin brothers. It simultaneously represents the cycle of life and death, a creative force woven into a life of solitude. It is a symbol held most dear to us and our work.

In many ways this spider acts as a signature to your work, do you think it is important that tattoos can be recognised and associated with their creator?

The widow does act as a signature indicating that the artwork was created by one of the two of us. I'm sure like many other artists with distinguishable or particular styles the artwork is usually easily placed without a signature, so that wasn't exactly the driving force or main intention for the use of our symbol. I think for the two of us the black widow was mostly just conceived as a vessel to unify our work in a stronger and more permanent manor as twin brothers. For our entire lives we've shared every-



thing including our artwork and concepts, and this was our way of expressing and sealing our bond with one another. Ryan has a second symbol sometimes used solely in his own work, an upside down heart. It initially stemmed when being used for specific characters to portray a means of turmoil or just being generally misunderstood, for example Professor Snape of Harry Potter who carries and conceals his inner anguish throughout the series.

It is obvious to see that a lot of your inspiration is drawn from the pages of gothic fiction and the horror genre, how have these art forms developed your practice over the years?

A lot of our work has drawn inspiration from all genres of cinematography throughout the years. One of the latest movies from the past few years has been *Crimson Peak* by director/screenwriter Guillermo del Toro, this film covers ground on almost every subject that's held our interest. If there was ever a movie made to sum up our own aesthetic and what we are about, we would say that this is the one; creating strong Victorian style settings throughout a haunting tale of murders, the paranormal, and love after death.

Even today we are still fascinated by the monster movie, what is it about these otherworldly creatures that keeps us enthralled? And, why do you think some choose to have these tattooed?

I think that, well for ourselves at least, that we continue to remain fascinated by these fictional characters because they are just staples throughout the timeline of horror. From *Nosferatu* to modern horror films, each has its own back-story or feeling that comes tied along with it, for example Mary Shelley's hideous yet emotional Frankenstein monster. Each film can deliver you into another place and time and has always helped us with capturing any needed inspiration or opening up our own imaginations to new creative ideas. Often, if we ever encounter any type of creative blocks we will watch some of our favourite movies; typically the genre is of horror or suspense. Just recently we've had a client who received a portrait of Morticia Addams (Anjelica Huston), it wasn't just for her love of *The Addams Family* or Morticia, but also to mark an important and difficult milestone in her life where this character served as a crucial aid in pushing through the worst of times.



**WE'VE ALWAYS FOUND OURSELVES FOLLOWING THE DARKNESS,
THERE'S A CERTAIN ROMANTICISM ABOUT WALKING HAND IN
HAND TO YOUR INEVITABLE DOOM**

What other tattooists do you admire that work within the similar themes of the horrific and occult?

I admire a lot of tattoo artists work but one that has to be mentioned is our good friend Sergei Titukh (@t_i_t_u_k_h) not only is he an extremely talented artist, but also such a humble and down to earth person that we adore entirely. Art wise one of our largest inspirations that has always been constant ever since we were kids is American film director and artist Tim Burton. Burton's whimsical movies and animations have always been so captivating to us and have played a huge role in our lives as well as our artwork. He was Matt's main inspiration for going on to film school for animation as well as having an early fascination with the darker arts in general. American illustrator and writer Edward Gorey is also another large influence on our work, commonly known for his unsettling scenes in Victorian and Edwardian settings such as *The Gashleycrumb Tinies*.

What does tattooing mean to you both?

Tattooing means literally everything to us; it's enabled us to express our selves freely whilst also building a stronger bond and connection with one another, as well as with our clients through art. Everyday is an opportunity for us to use our tattooing as a vessel for both our emotions and for new ideas. It also serves as an outlet for our clients both mentally and spiritually as well. We would both have to agree that tattooing has helped us learn more about ourselves and has also played a large role in the people that we have become today. It's helped ground us in the best way possible, and we consider ourselves blessed for everyday that we can carry and share this with each other always. The amount of friends and tremendous amount of support we've had throughout seems almost unreal, there's no amount of gratitude that we could suffice. ▣



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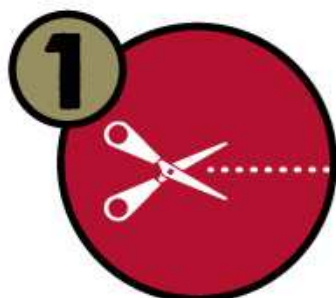
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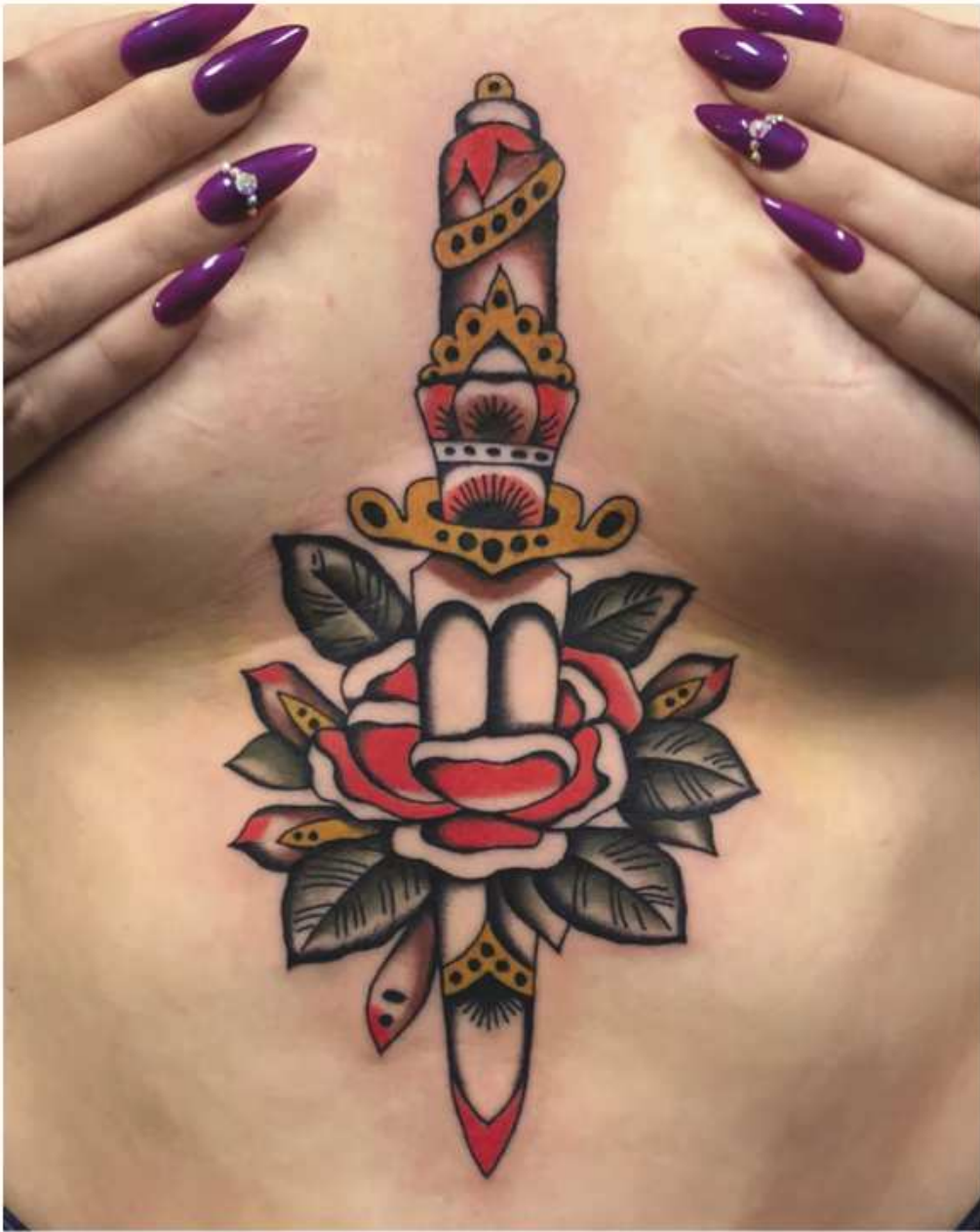


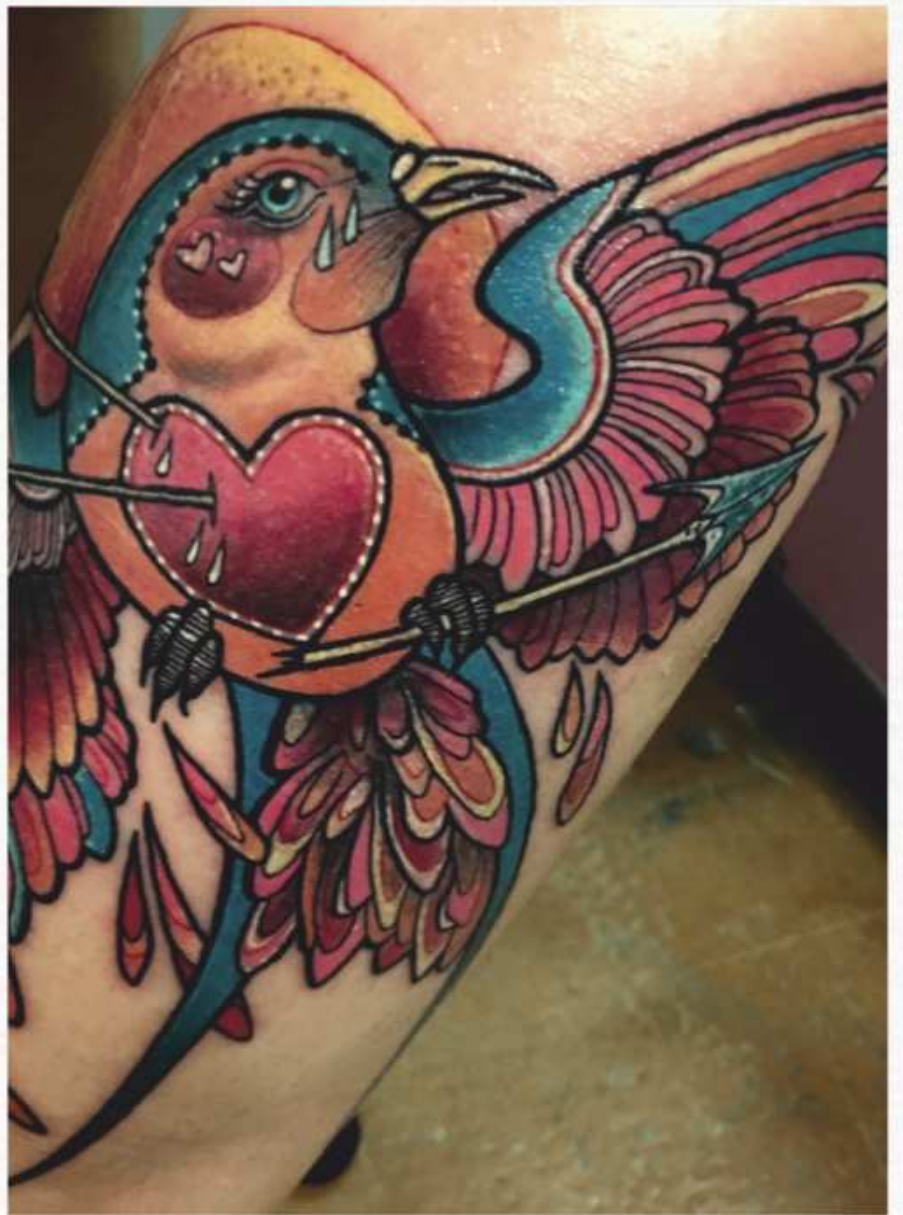
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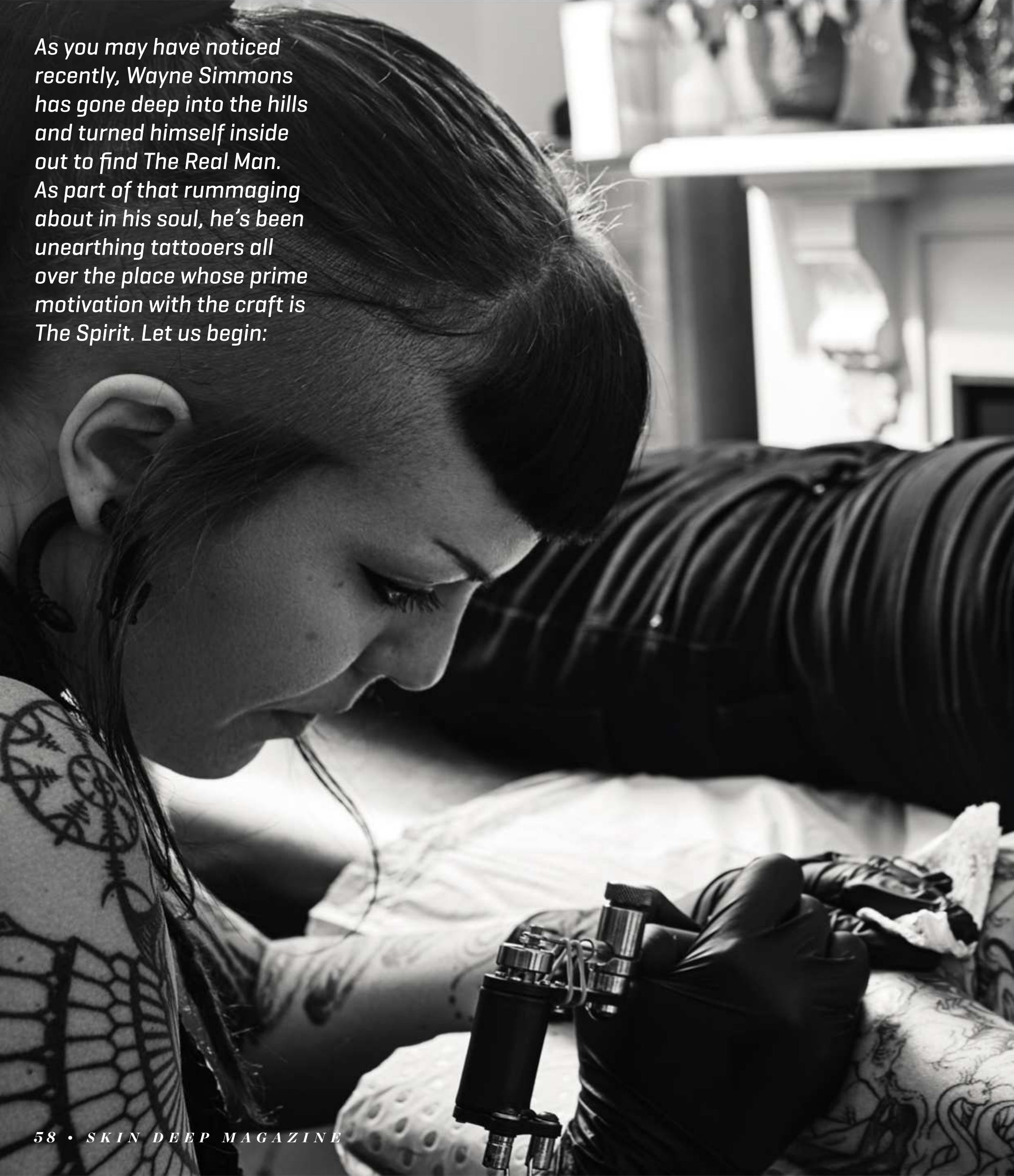
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AS ABOVE,

As you may have noticed recently, Wayne Simmons has gone deep into the hills and turned himself inside out to find The Real Man. As part of that rummaging about in his soul, he's been unearthing tattooers all over the place whose prime motivation with the craft is The Spirit. Let us begin:





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Tattoos with Higher Purpose

SO BELOW



The connection between tattoos and ritual is as old as the hills themselves. The whole art form was almost certainly born out of ritual and many tribal communities continue to use tattoos in this way today. But for Australian artist, Danica Morgan (aka Nickas Serpentarius) it goes beyond that. Danica can see the ritualistic nature of tattooing embedded even within the likes of old school traditional. “Sailors would have got a pig and a rooster tattooed on their feet,” she points out, “the idea being that as they were both land animals, if you fell overboard they would bring you back to shore. Now that is symbolic magic if ever I heard it.”

And there’s more. Much, much more. Ritual, she would argue – and I would very much agree – is at the heart of pretty much all tattooing. The ink shows on TV are perhaps a contrived example, but they do show people seeking tattoos with a very definite purpose in mind, more times than not with some ritualistic intention. For Danica, this shouldn’t surprise us - tattoos and ritual go hand and hand, she would argue, they always have and they always will. “They are used to mark life experiences. To venerate the dead, heal emotional hurts, reclaim body parts or mark rites of passage.”

With her own art, ritual work is integral. In fact, for Danica, a tattoo session could be as important for a per-



son's spiritual and emotional development as any religious ceremony or counselling session. "One of the things I love most about tattooing is that you are put in the privileged position of being with people whilst they go through a painful ordeal - and that allows walls to be broken down." She explains how she will always try to find a path to meaningful conversation with clients. For those who are open to it, she can go even further, using the tattoo to help the client work through whatever trauma they are experiencing. "I have done private sessions with clients where the aim is to specifically create a safe space for catharsis, releasing of hurts and overcoming issues. Tears are not unknown of in such sessions."

It doesn't always go as deep as that, of course. But at the very least, Danica would explain the symbolism contained within a tattoo and, being a self-confessed symbol nerd, this comes quite naturally to her. "If someone wants flowers incorporated within a design, I will talk them through the deeper meanings traditionally associated with that plant or help them pick plants that better match their desired outcome."

Some people, as Danica points out, just want a pretty picture on their skin and really aren't really that concerned about the meanings behind it. "Which is fine," she accepts. "The meaning of their tattoo could just be put down to a love of art, which is a worthy enough meaning in its own right. Some people maybe haven't thought that deeply but really get into it when you open up avenues for them while others really are looking for that deeper, spiritual ritual process."

For those people, Danica would like to offer a more involved process but feels that it requires considerable privacy, being a much more immersive experience, perhaps, than what the average tattoo studio setup would cater for. "I am very interested in Sak Yant practices, for example, as, out of all the traditional tattooing practises I have looked into, its protocols most closely map to what I am naturally drawn to in my own spiritual practise: incense, symbols, astrological timings, chants and focussed intention."

In many ways, Danica's interest in the more spiritually enriching elements of tattooing is born out of her own plight. As a white Australian, she talks of an acute feeling of cultural and spiritual disenfranchisement. "I keenly sense the hole left by the complete and utter colonisation of my family line. As much as I love the Australian landscape, there is some instinctive part of me that feels my own native roots - I can sense it in the way I feel drawn towards European plants and landscapes. And whilst I have had some very interesting interactions with Aboriginal Genius Locci, they are not of my ancestral line." Despite being sixth generation Australian on her mother's side, Danica describes herself as feeling "dislocated" in Australia. She talks of craving the sacred sites of her people. "My own indigenous culture is lost beyond living memory, and far across the sea."

She identifies in the broadest sense as pagan, but sees an ever-searching mindset as integral to any good belief system. "I am rather uncomfortable with putting labels on myself, as one of the core elements of my belief structure is that it is constantly up for review. But I guess if I had to choose something, it would be Chaos or Hedge Witch. That said, I am willing to explore any system and keep the tech that works. Any time I discover new information, I try it out with my current understanding of reality and see if I can get anything to jigsaw together."

To date, Danica has explored a variety of systems such as tarot, symbolic magic, dreamwork and the making of fetishes and charms. She has taken elements from indig-



enous cultures, such as the Runa Puma, as well as some tenets within Islamic mysticism, and cites various teachers such as Vali Myers, Terrance McKenna and Sarah Anne Lawless as inspirational. “I have a very low tolerance for spiritual ‘faff’ and ego. Sarah was the first person whose writings on the subjects of witchcraft and spirituality most closely map to my own. It was through her that the roads into deeper levels of understanding opened up. It led me to Rune Soup and the writings and podcasts of Gordon White, who keeps a pretty steady stream of interesting guests and topics flowing and is currently on a personal mission to re-enchant the world.”

Danica has been working on some enchanting projects herself, of recent, including an elaborate back piece detailing chakra points and a full sleeve bringing together elements of animal medicine, astrology and other symbology. Over the years, she has created tattoos designed to aid lucid dreaming or reclaim what she describes as “unloved or traumatically injured body parts.” She loves to tattoo anything related to folklore, mythology and religious art. But when it all boils down, the most spiritually

significant ink is that which she has sought out herself. “The majority of my tattoos are markers of my own spiritual development and devotions to spirits and gods that have been important to me. I have ‘channels’ of negative space running through my sleeves and a dedicated ‘as above’ and ‘so below’ side, with corresponding imagery. The capping part of each shoulder is an amalgamation of the Ægishjálmr and the Choku Rei, creating a doubled down symbol of connection, protection and power.”

The power of tattoo ink to aid magical or spiritual work is not to be underestimated. The ritualistic importance of tattooing remains as important today to an artist like Danica as it was to any of the ancient tribespeople of yesteryear. “I use tattoos as an aid to meditation and the drawing of power,” she tells me, pointing out her own personal experience of results and progress through ink. “I am very interested in Icelandic runestaves, for example. My partner and I both have Galdrastafir of varying types tattooed on our bodies for magical purposes that have had eerily effective outcomes.”

I wouldn't doubt it for a second. ▣





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BEYOND THE DARKNESS

In 2018, what does it mean to be a tattoo artist and what does it mean to get tattooed? There was one artist in particular who Rebecca Givens was eager to pose these questions to

Tattoos aren't just tattoos—that's why we manage to fill pages and pages of this magazine each month. There is just so much bubbling beneath the surface... of every line, every image, every shade, every artist, every time someone sits in that chair.

Travelling to Bali earlier this year, I was made aware of a creative soul making a name for herself over there, as well as here in the UK. As soon as I gazed at the incredibly beautiful and complex work of Belle Atrix, I knew that she would have a lot to say about how our spiritual art-form stands for so much more than a simple selection of photos shared on Instagram. This is her story, her exploration of what lies beneath our bodies, what can be found beyond the shadows of ink that adorn our skin.

WHERE DID YOUR JOURNEY INTO TATTOOING BEGIN?

I've been tattooing for around 6 years now. It's been a bumpy ride, full of euphoric moments and immersive challenges. It began when I was naive, stuck in a rut about which path to tread in order to lead a creatively-fulfilling life.

After years of rattling around, causing damage inside and out, I craved salvation. I'd been warned against tattooing by many naysaying nancies who advised that it wasn't worth the effort to enter into such a competitive industry. I believe the words 'cut-throat' were even used at one point, which filled me with dread about adopting a

dream vocation whilst gargling gibberish out of a freshly-slit oesophagus. And yet, I was desperate to escape a life of bobbing along in blinkered compliance. I'd often wonder what it might feel like to etch doodles into the flesh of strangers. The idea always had a powerful magnetic pull to it. It seemed like, somehow, it was what I was built to do in order to feel liberated from society's confines. I developed a bizarre faith in the process.

I was invited to the London Tattoo Convention and after a lot of nervous faffing about with my little book of scribbles at hand, I plucked up the courage to ask the artists I adored most at the time if they had any room for a raggamuffin apprentice. I remember the elated rush I received when it turned out that, yes they were, on condition I move to Germany for the training. I ran from my cradle of comfort to Wurzburg to begin the rocky roller-coaster of my tattooing career.

LONDON AND BALI—BOTH VERY DIFFERENT PLACES, RIGHT?!

I was born and bread in dutty ol' London, and I visited Bali for the first time last year and sort of fell in love with it a little bit. It has a special kind of spiritual lure for me, somewhere I really feel at home and at peace (except for that time a conniving monkey ripped off my sarong and I had to do my best to inconspicuously tiptoe about in underwear towards the exit in the garden of a temple where it is forbidden to even uncover a naked shin).





The contrast between London and Bali is so extreme. Bali carries a strange mysticism with it that I can't wait to go back to and explore more of. Once you get past the magnificence of the nature, there are other things I noticed there. Everything is more immediate, strange. Synchronicities would take place often, a solidifying feeling of being in the right place, blessed, would accompany me wherever I went, even at the worst of times when things didn't go as expected. I learnt a lot there in a very short amount of time.

I started to cry when I arrived back on the contemptuous concrete of London, feeling the dissipation of that all-encompassing zen energy I would eagerly swig back in Bali. It had been replaced with gut-wrenching fumes of petrol, McDonald's chip batter, a soundtrack of ever-bleeping devices, mucus-y coughing and irritable squawking. The height of drama at which my Bali bubble burst may also have had something to do with enduring two 8-hour flights in a row after getting my bum bum painted black, scurrying along, legs akimbo, stretched wide like a giant crab to avoid the suction of one freshly healing fanny-flap to its twin, struggling with bulbous suitcases after already enduring the agonising experience of tearing apart sticky suckered together flesh around my arse crack from sitting down for too long on the plane. Note to self—do not travel directly after enduring a 3-day

stint of scarification and extensive lower body tattooing. Foolish twat.

London is where I am more routine-based and focused, but where I find little meditative release, but I am always trying to push myself creatively wherever I am. In Bali I found that there was a flow to this, it seemed more organic, the way my work began to progress in this atmosphere. That was a very happy time for me and I am excited to return and explore more of this globe. Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Brazil, Thailand and Berlin are all top of my list, but there are no definite arrangements just yet.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR APPROACH TO TATTOOING AND ART?

Art is built into the core of my existence. It sounds bleak to say but I reckon I'd be buried and chewed-up by worms at this point without it. To create is what I live for, it puts colour into experience, things move faster and brighter and I never stop learning. To describe what I do with tattooing I guess is a mixture of different styles: sketch-style black-work, abstract brush strokes, solid black, fine-line illustration and geometric dot-work and line-work... all which push against extremes of chaos and order, themes that seem to stalk me religiously throughout my life.

Right now I'm focusing more on fitting tattoos succinctly with body-form and liberating myself with more drawn-



on designs, both of which I have previously struggled with and am keen to become stronger at. I do my best to challenge myself as often as I can. I enjoy change and I hope to continually be evolving. Tattooing triggers the liberation of celestial flow and frees me from the hot slums of hell, an instant cure for the itchy-brain scratch of static.

I AM A HUGE FAN OF SOLID BLACK-OUT WORK AND THINK YOUR TATTOOS ARE BEAUTIFUL... TELL US ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE IN YOUR OWN TATTOO JOURNEY. TO YOU, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GET TATTOOED, AND BE A TATTOOED WOMAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Once upon a time when I was a numb-nuts preteen and a massive social liability, myself and my brother Dash began practising piercing and hand-poking tattoos. The first one he did on me was with a microscopic sewing needle built for a bloody borrower. I opted for a self-indulgent Latin quote about the meaning of life (or some similar bollocks) along the side of my palm. Because of the size of the needle and the precise nature of hand-poking it took a laborious 4 hours and gave me a swollen balloon mitt of a hand for a while after. It is still one of my favourites. That was an exciting time for us. We were both experimenting with sticking needles into ourselves creatively, but it took a while for us both to think of it as a serious option for the future.

When I moved back to London to take on a second

apprenticeship, Dash acted as my crash-test-dummy-canvas for all the silly stoned inky markings I practised in the beginning once I had my hands on a machine—always keeping the faith despite having virtually no idea back then, taking my machine out of the shop (which was strictly forbidden so it was a very naughty business). I started tattooing my legs extensively with all sorts of warped doodles, as a form of therapy more than anything. It began because I wanted to get better as fast as possible, and then I got carried away doing it, with increasing fury and unthinking shitness to distract away from the inner turmoil I was feeling for my dad who was terminally ill at home at the time. I took breaks to spend time with him, listening to stories, forcing healthy smoothies down his gullet and laughing through re-runs of *The Simpsons* before he died.

That was a very weird time. I was on my own through the majority of it. Tattooing was all I had and I was determined not to give up, armed with an endless supply of ideas to prick into my flesh, I tattooed everywhere I could reach. Hand, fingers, palm, legs, feet, fingers, belly. I remember trying to do lots of them in the mirror which was a massive head fuck, contorting my body into all sorts of backward bending shapes like a yoga instructor on crack. When something didn't work, I would just layer it with something else, I think one of my shins has about 6 layers of different tattoos—it was a madness. There were times I thought I might spontaneously combust out of frustration. I believe some of those tattoos actually turned out alright but overall it was just too confusing to look at from a distance. I started to associate it all with a time of great mental torment which is why I began the process of blacking it all out and starting fresh.

Black-work tattooing is a practice, ancient and timeless. Respected in a multitude of tribes for centuries, in Native America, Polynesia, Borneo, The Philippines, Samoa and countless other sections of the planet, this ritual marks people as warriors and guides them through challenges. In tribes, it symbolises the essential need in humans for struggle and tests of endurance in order to develop spiritually and gain sanctity after death. It represents strength and individual worth and is highly respected in these cultures. The Kayan tribe have tattooing as a universal practice—they say that the designs act as 'torches into the next world' and that without the light of these torches they would remain in total darkness when dead. There are many similar examples of this belief, that tattoos act as protection when shifting through the transformative death portal into the next realm. Something that stands out in stark contrast with some of the opinions I've received from puzzled Westerners like: 'U mad tho?' and 'Y u dun that for?!'

In terms of tattooists, many people have helped me with it along the way including my brother Dash (Instagram @dash_ft) and Luke Ashley (@lukeaashley) an old



friend, both doing incredible work. A trusted friend Liniwa has done the massive majority (@dgnspirit) for which my appreciation runs deep, he also did the Tibetan script across my face. Others artists include the brilliant Alice (@aliceofthedeath), Phred (@phrederic) and in Bali the first gruelling ten and a half hour session on my arse by @blackrajahtatu, and then the master @benihbumi got right up in the bum crack, pussy lips, thigh meaty creases, hips and one solitary tit. I also send special thanks to Matthew (@matthewjamestattoo), Rob Sutherland, Gordo (@gordoletters), Laurent (@darkbaba_fakeguru_), Holly (@hollyprycejones), Yann (@yann_brenyak) and Eric (@awakentothrone). My plans for the rest of my body are unclear at the moment, I doubt I will do a full black-work body suit which is what people keep asking me but who knows, I can't predict how this transformation will progress in the future. Hopefully I intend to add some scarification over the top of all the black once it's settled and I'm ready for a nice slicing.

Blacking-out all those layers became, and still is, the most cathartic and transcendent life experience I've been blessed to receive—skin repainted intimately and infinitely, sometimes with slow breaths, deep release, lulled into a bloodletting lullaby, other times with eyes rolled

back and rattling in skull, gnashing teeth and murderous intent. My body is a diary, buried in incredible enlightened jolts of painful poetry and synapse-snapping moments in which I learn how much I truly trust all that I am. It reminds me of the incontrovertible truth, that here is the totality of existence, this deep meditative presence and we are all a part of it.

I love to push my own limits in the realms of pain and pleasure, to reach new perceptions, to learn and evolve and to find strength and sense in this digital realm I feel so alien in. Pain is a signal, it's our body's protection mechanism, an impulse to stop. What if you could break through that barrier? Where would it take you? When climbing toward an apex of extreme physical pain, the only thing to be done is surrender. With surrender comes relief and for me a huge release of detoxifying endorphins, a melting of old acidic memories threaded together through time, the collection of calamities unwelcome in my mind that had existed so long they were beginning to rot. This ritual of black-work smashes through them like a valiant mallet. It heals me. I stay connected with my new perspective, I never forget the past but I learn to live my life in respect for my shadow and in negotiation with it. I befriend fears, to understand them, to master my mind, to bleed the cure. For silence and for love. ▣

Belle Atrix can be found on Instagram @atrixbelle and @blood_spirit or via her clothing brand bloodmantra.com. Her other recent projects include drawing on skateboards (@big_aye_Skateboards) and designing for handmade clothing company @born.in.dust.

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The SERPENTS of BIENVILLE

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Last month I introduced you to an incredible artist from the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Matt Stebly. His great grandfather is a rather infamous artist, Walter Anderson. Anderson was known for his experiential art, and the mythological stories that followed him:

Anderson was a man that was distant from his family, tormented by his thoughts, and overwhelmed with the world around him, in all its beauty and pain. The two are both incredible artists in their own right, but Stebly picks up almost like a book mark from where Anderson left off. We also went over the idea of Epigenetics, which is the study of inherited changes in gene expression; changes that are inherited and not inherent to our DNA. For example, life experiences, which aren't directly coded in human DNA, can actually be passed on to children. In our prior article I posed the question, could Stebly be picking up where Anderson left off due to a genetic imprint? If so, Stebly took those grandiose artist experiences lived by Anderson and learned from them, becoming a more refined, healthy, productive creator. Stebly is now a family focused shop



owner, successful artist, and runs the Due South Tattoo Convention, all while still keeping a strong connection with those around him, including his family.

Walter Anderson is a bit of a paradox, with many sharing accounts of his isolating tendencies, disappearing for month's at a time. He had a complicated relationship with his family, and it wasn't until after his death that one of his son's, John Anderson, came to the realisation that he felt his father had a deep love for his family. After his father passed when he was 18, with the encouragement of his mother, John took a rowboat out to Horn Island and found artwork he never expected to see. Among the piles of paper were paintings of a young boy and a cat, a cat that John loved as a child. John came to conclusion that his father was always there, watching, from a distance. If there was ever a place for a book mark, it would be here, isolated, long-



Tattoo by Matt Stebly



Tattoo by Matt Stebly

ing to be with family. Matt Stebly does have a similar longing to create in isolation, but unlike Anderson, Stebly knows that in order to be most effective in his creation process, he can't be a hermit. Stebly has made a conscious effort to create the environment needed to truly thrive.

Dylan Sartin was 22 when he walked into Twisted Anchor Tattoo inquiring about an apprenticeship. He had taken a few classes at a community college and was planning to go to Memphis College of Arts, but he couldn't afford it. Sartin asked Stebly about an apprenticeship, to which Stebly responded that his biggest pet peeve was when people asked about an apprenticeship without a portfolio, so Sartin got to work. It was during this process that Sartin fell in love with the art he saw being created by tattooers, and he focused on filling that portfolio with sketches reflecting that, all while working two jobs and going to school. All of this led to an emotional breakdown and a final



Art by Matt Stebly

commitment to being a full time artist. Sartin quit his jobs and went to Twisted Anchor.

Sartin recounts that day, "I was so nervous and because of my lack preparedness the last time, I made sure I would blow his mind with a card stock resume and almost 40 drawings and paintings I had made in that time. I walked in expecting to have to beg. Matt looked through my portfolio without saying anything and said, 'Come hangout tomorrow.' So I did, and the rest is history. About a year later I asked him why he decided to apprentice me, and he told me that out of everyone who came to him about an apprenticeship he always told them the same thing about making a portfolio, and I was the only one who ever came back with one. I still think about those words to this day."

Sartin continues about Twisted Anchor, "Twisted Anchor is Home, it's the place I've spent almost everyday for the last five years. I'm Twisted Anchors oldest employee and I'm more com-



fortable here than anywhere else. The shops dynamic is very close, like a family.”

Stebly created Twisted Anchor out of necessity, creating a home for the community he wanted to have. Stebly was 21 when he started his apprenticeship, almost the same age as Sartin. Recollecting on this time, Stebly says that, “Persistence was key.” He started working at a local shop, first mopping floors, then drawing tattoo designs, he was there everyday. Eventually his level of commitment was obvious and an apprenticeship followed. Stebly had been getting tattooed since he was 18, and the career of tattooing was something that could be all his own, something that wasn’t in the same shadow as his already flourishing painting career. He wanted to do more for his community, he wanted to create his own mark.

Stebly says, “I know Ocean Springs is a small little town, but even being know as ‘That tattoo guy’ e in my little town in Mississippi means something to me. All I have ever wanted was to leave my mark on this world, but leaving my mark on my home town has always come first.”

Tattooing was where Stebly found his future, and in tattooing, he found a growing community to be a part of. Unlike the isolation of Anderson, Stebly goes out of his way to create connections, and those connections led to

incredible events like the Due South Convention. The community surrounding Anderson didn’t happen until after his death, Stebly on the other hand, created that community to live and thrive in now.

Walter Anderson was sick for nearly a year before he died of lung cancer. He told no one of his condition because he didn’t want to trouble anyone with his problems. This is another bookmark moment, one that may be genetically imprinted, and one that may have helped Stebly create a community of respected artists on the southern Gulf Coast. Stebly opened Twisted Anchor in 2012. When asked about why he decided to jump into such an endeavour, Stebly says, “I created Twisted Anchor out of necessity. I wanted a place that was a creative environment filled with artists that all wanted the same thing (to help each other grow as artist and tattooers). I never wanted to own a shop, but I knew if I was going to have one I had to make it something special, something the people in Ocean Springs Mississippi had never seen before.

I have been luck to find the crew I have now. They all have come to the shop in different ways. I can honestly say I couldn’t have found a better group of people to work with every day. Seeing how much they all have grown artistically since they came to the shop makes me think this



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin



Tattoo by Dylan Sartin

whole thing works. Hopefully they will keep putting up with me for years to come.”

Unlike Walter Anderson, Stebly focus’s on the importance of being open, vulnerable, and accessible. He still has the passion for freedom that was found in his great grandfather, but now that wildfire has been refined to have its greatest impact. Stebly’s goal is tied with the one thing that seemed so fleeting to Walter Anderson during his lifetime, a direct link with his legacy.

Stebly says, “My only goal was to create an amazing environment not only for the clients but for the artist. You have to have balance in a shop. You have to give freedom to create but there also has to be structure to survive as a business. I’m sure some tattooers may disagree but that’s ok.. I run the shop to be as efficient as possible. This gives the artist more time to do what they love and that’s tattoo. The only goal I have for the shop besides longevity is creating a legacy.”

After achieving success quickly with Twisted Anchor, Stebly began to look onto broader horizons, combining his love for the Gulf Coast and his love for tattooing, he figured out a way to show tattooers from around his world that his beloved area was beautiful, thriving and growing. In 2013 Stebly put together the first Due South Tattoo Convention, bringing artists from around the world to

his beloved Mississippi Gulf Coast, while also showing his community that tattooing could be like nothing they had seen before, inspiring artists for years on.

Stebly says, “It was pretty much a leap of faith. I started traveling about six years ago and I really just wanted to bring a great tattoo and art event to Mississippi. This goes into the conversation I had with my wife, Gina, when she asked me ‘Why do you do this?’ And I told her that it’s just a piece of the bigger picture. My ultimate goal whether it be Twisted Anchor , Due South , or the apparel is just to create a legacy not just for myself but for tattooers and artist in the South. I want to give back to the area that has given so much to me.

The show has constantly grown over the last few years. I have been luck enough to have had tons of amazing artist attend the show the last four years and I have been overwhelmed by all the positive feed back I have received from them. I created this event for tattooers, if they have a great time that makes the atmosphere of the entire show electric. Obviously I want all the clients and spectators to have a great time but without tattooers it would be a pretty boring tattoo convention.

It does take a huge amount of work to put on Due South (without my assistant / shop manager Christina Jackson



All tattoos on this page by Dylan Sartin



it wouldn't be possible) but I take a great amount of pride in doing all the little details that a lot of shows don't do. All of the trophies and artist passes are hand made by me and even though it's tedious it's definitely something I love doing and love seeing in the artist hands. At the end of the day I'm a creature and i love to create things."

Stebly mentioned apparel earlier, along with creating awards, which is another facet to everything he is doing, much like his great grandfather, Stebly feels the need to create on his terms, at all times.

Stebly says, "I want to create things , tangible usable things. I have been making t-shirts with my designs on them since I was a child, but I always hated not having control over the final product. So a few years ago I bought/made all of the equipment to print my own shirts. There was definitely a learning curve of teaching myself but being able to have the control over every single shirt that is printed has made the product that much better. I

take pride in my name and if my name is on something I'm going to make it the best I possibly can."

Scientists dispute the idea of Epigenetics, but whether or not genetic memory can be passed down, one thing is certain, Matt Stebly is creating a new redemptive chapter to this family of artists story. Stebly knows that art cannot exist without community for it to thrive. Art is a form of communication, it binds us all, with a craft like tattooing bonding us for life. From the personal investment he has with the artists in his shop, the investment he has in his local community, the love for his tattoo community, and the need to create on his own terms; Stebly is continuing on a legacy from his great grandfather. That legacy began like wildfire, uncontrolled and painful, and is now refined and precise, changing the landscape he lives in. Stebly's next chapter will be far greater than anything that came before him, and I for one am excited for where the story will go.

To learn more about Matt Stebly many projects visit <https://duesouthtattoo.com> and <https://twistedanchortattoo.com>, or he can be found on Instagram @mattsteblytattoos @twistedanchortattoo @duesouthtattooexpo

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AN ABSTRACT THOUGHT

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First with carpentry, illustration, then fine art and finally tattooing artist Sanne Vaghi has always worked with concepts of lines and negative space, her work has a unique and tangible organic quality that takes its inspirations from beyond the skin. Nicky Connor catches up with Sanne, to find out more

After high school, I started carpentry school in Amsterdam, after a few years I decided to leave this and apply for the Willem de Kooning Art Academy in Rotterdam. There I studied Illustration for 3 years and later changed to Fine Arts and graduated in 2008. During my studies, I discovered my love for photography and printing techniques, like etching and silkscreen. I worked a lot with pinhole photography and specialised in a printing technique called 'Intaglio', which combines photography and etching. Working with this technique I could create structures on the etching plate and I recognise now that these elements come back in work I make today. It was during my studies at the carpentry school, that I met tattooist David Kotker, at the time he was running his studio 'No Hope No Fear' in Amsterdam. David became my friend and it was he who introduced me into tattooing, which I am very grateful for.

However, it was not until after my graduation from the Art Academy

IT HAS BEEN A LONG AND HARD ROAD TO GET TO THE PLACE WHERE I AM TODAY IN MY WORK AND I FEEL THAT IT WAS MY DECISION TO MOVE TO BERLIN, GERMANY IN 2011 CHANGED EVERYTHING.



WHAT FASCINATES ME IS THE FEELING OF TRANSIENCE IN THE NATURE WORLD, MADE VISIBLE THROUGH NATURAL STRUCTURES, PATTERNS AND THROUGH DECAY AND DEATH.

FREE TIME

I find it important to create time outside of work for friends and family, as I am lucky to have many wonderful people around me, that support and inspire me. I believe that my personal well-being is a big influence on my work and I want to balance my working life and my personal life, spending time with my dog and friends. I also enjoy traveling not just for work, but for relaxation and inspiration.

that my full focus turned to tattooing, since that time I have had several apprenticeships and worked at several studios in the Netherlands. It has been a long and hard road to get to the place where I am today in my work and I feel that it was my decision to move to Berlin, Germany in 2011 that changed everything. This move made me grow as an individual, which is reflected in my work and as I look back at my work in the last few years, I recognize that each time there was a moment of personal growth (usually because of difficult life lessons), my work has evolved with me. My designs have become less constricted, freer, maybe because I feel more at peace with myself and allow myself more space. I'm very curious how my work will evolve in

the coming years. My aim is that my work is always in progress, like myself.

INSPIRATIONS

I get inspired by different elements from my life and the experiences I had. Nature is a big inspiration for me and besides my love for natural shapes, what fascinates me is the feeling of transience in the nature world, made visible through natural structures, patterns and through decay and death. This is shown not only in nature, but also in architecture; old buildings, cemeteries with traces of time past. I have been fascinated by these places with since I was young, I always had a love for the darker, melancholic parts of life. If I look back at the etchings I made in art school, I see similarities in the work I create now. There has been always an emptiness, a negative space that emphasizes the lines and structures and have a feeling of transience. Music is also one of my other passions, I can't imagine my life without it, it's of such importance to me and is always there during tattooing, but especially during drawing. The feeling of melancholy is present in a lot of the music I listen to.



Personal growth is also very important for me, to be able to get to most out of who you are or can be as a person. I think fear prevents us from growing and I want to try to keep doing things that might scare me at first. For example, I have a fear of pain, even though I work with pain. Some close friends of mine have been working with body suspension for a long time and through them, I had the opportunity to experience it. Suspension is an important way for me to go beyond my fear of pain and has become an important healing ritual in my life, that helps me on many different levels.

DEVELOPING A STYLE

I find it difficult to describe my own style, but I would say it's very organic, as I mentioned before my style has developed with my own personal growth. Some elements that have always been present in my work are the nature-related themes, like animals and flowers but, it is lines that for a long time have been the base of my work. Initially I created more illustrative designs and slowly the lines have taken the upper hand and my work has become more and more abstract. A few years ago, I started working completely freehand



AS I LOOK BACK AT MY WORK IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, I RECOGNISE THAT EACH TIME THERE WAS A MOMENT OF PERSONAL GROWTH, MY WORK HAS EVOLVED WITH ME.

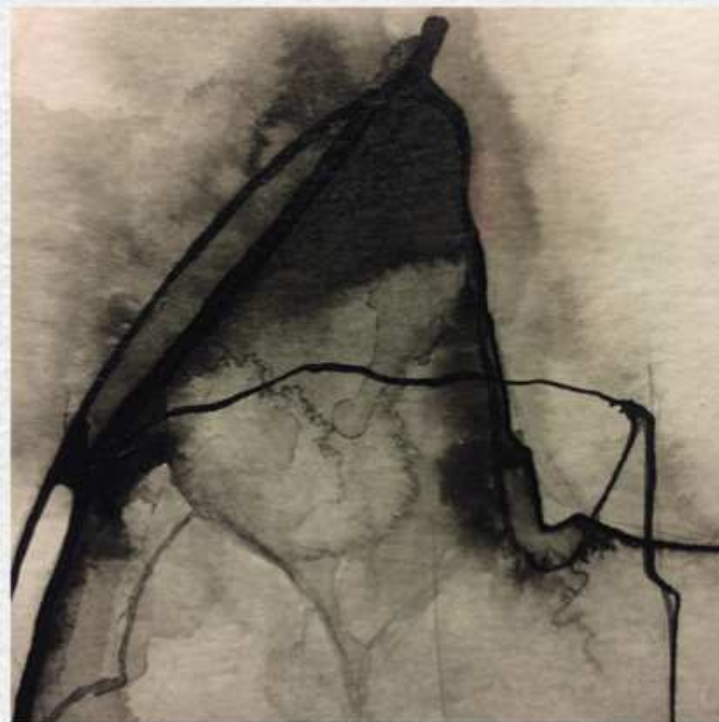
with abstract designs and nowadays most of my tattoos are freehand. I feel it's such an honour that the client gives me the freedom and the trust to work in this way. Working freehand allows the lines to create a natural flow on the body and the tattoo becomes a part of the body, instead of just a picture on the skin. Also, by working this way the tattoo becomes a collaboration between me and the client and even the client's body.

COLLABORATION

When I client contacts me I ask them for a short description of their tattoo idea and 3 images of my work that they prefer. Based on this I either work freehand or create a custom design. But I also like to let the client choose designs from my sketchbook and we combine the sketches with freehand work. Some clients give me all the freedom to create the design and others prefer to make suggestions. I enjoy both ways of working, when a collaboration happens between me and the client I feel it also gives me new inspiration as the client might suggest things I have not thought of before.

While working freehand the shape of the body and energy of the client inspires me. For me the placement of the tattoo is as important as the tattoo itself, I focus a lot on the negative space as this creates the assembly





PERSONAL GROWTH IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT FOR ME, TO BE ABLE TO GET TO MOST OUT OF WHO YOU ARE OR CAN BE AS A PERSON.

with the body. The lines should emphasise the shape of the body and the character of the lines should fit the client. Initially I was also not aware of the intimate connection you can have with a client, this moment of someone giving you their trust, experiencing pain and often sharing personal stories. I feel grateful for meeting so many beautiful people through my work. And not only honoured that they share their skin with me, but also share part of themselves through our conversations.

I feel the designs I create today are very close to my 'inner world'. A customer of mine once told me that my work has an emotional language, which I think is a lovely way of describing my designs. I know my tattoos do not speak to everyone, which is completely fine, but what I enjoy is that the clients that come to me, feel very connected to my designs and

with almost all my clients I feel that we can relate on many levels, either by the way we look at life or the music we listen to.

WORKSPACE

For the last 4 years, I have been working at Zoes Zirkus in Berlin, owned by Zoe Thorne, it's a lovely, small and quiet space. I enjoy working with Zoe and she has been tattooing for 20 years which allows me to learn from her experience. At the moment Zoe and myself work there with Christian Eisenhofer in addition to guest artists and we all work by appointment only. I really like working in a studio that is quiet and where I can make my own schedule and take all the time I need for my clients.

Besides working in Berlin, I also traveling frequently for guest spots and I enjoy the contrast of working in busier places. Working with different artists, in different countries both teaches me a lot and inspires me as well. I'm someone that needs change, I tend to get restless if all is the same. I feel good having a home base, but the traveling also gives me something, it feeds this need I have for new experiences. ▣

ARTISTS INSPIRATION

There are several artists that inspire me, photographers like Joel Peter Within, Isolde Ohlbaum. And artists like Jan Toorop, Ernst Haeckel, Klimt and Schiele. Also since music is such a big part of my life there are definitely musicians that inspired me, like Nils Frahm, and many others.

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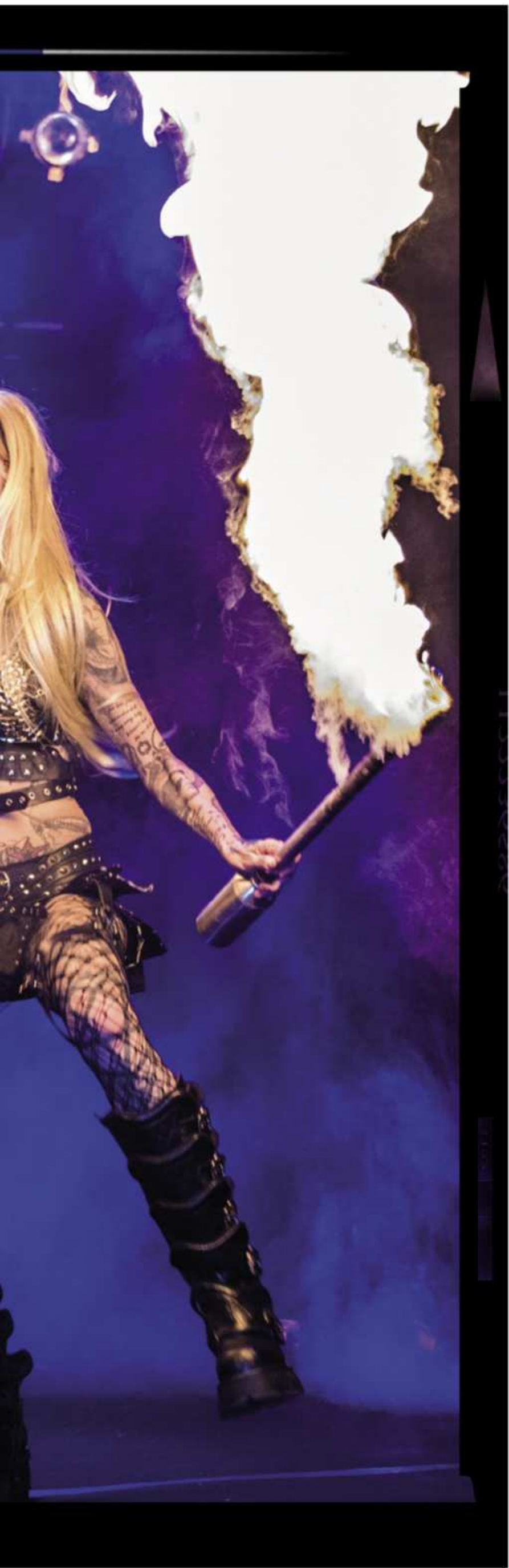
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BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION

9-11 November 2018



Rightly hailed—and looked forward to—as one of the premier shows in Europe (if not the world), Brussels Tattoo Convention is worth every ounce of hype you've ever heard about it...

Exactly why is both obvious and yet hard to explain. With an overwhelming amount of world class tattooers spread across huge rooms that never seem to end, you can spend all three days here and every day is like somebody came in overnight and reconstructed it anew for the next day. Entertainment wise, the show is fully loaded with wrestling, girls doing 'things' with fire, stunts, bands, dancers... and yet if you were of a mind—as I happened to be this weekend—you can avoid it all and that is strange.

I didn't go out of my way to avoid it. I knew where it was but there was simply so much quality work afoot, it would have been irresponsible not to take as much of it in as possible.

I guess part of the beauty of Brussels is that it's more or less bang in the middle of Europe. It's easy to get to for everybody on this mass of land we tend to think of as different countries—there's very little hassle involved in getting there and there are more hotels than you can throw stones at too. It's basically a city geared up for getting things done.

But the biggest discovery perhaps—and I know I wasn't alone in this because I was out there with Mark Poole and Bez—was in how much the fields of tattooing talent have turned over. A huge number of artist names were new to me... I would even go so far as to say 'the majority' of artists and that was a great surprise. Sure, there were a few buddies around in the shape of Rose Price, Max Pniewski, Lionel Fahy, Jorge Becerra, Mr Hyde but for the most part, the show held an exciting ar-

BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION

ray of new faces... and I get around the world as much as I can, so it's not like I haven't been looking.

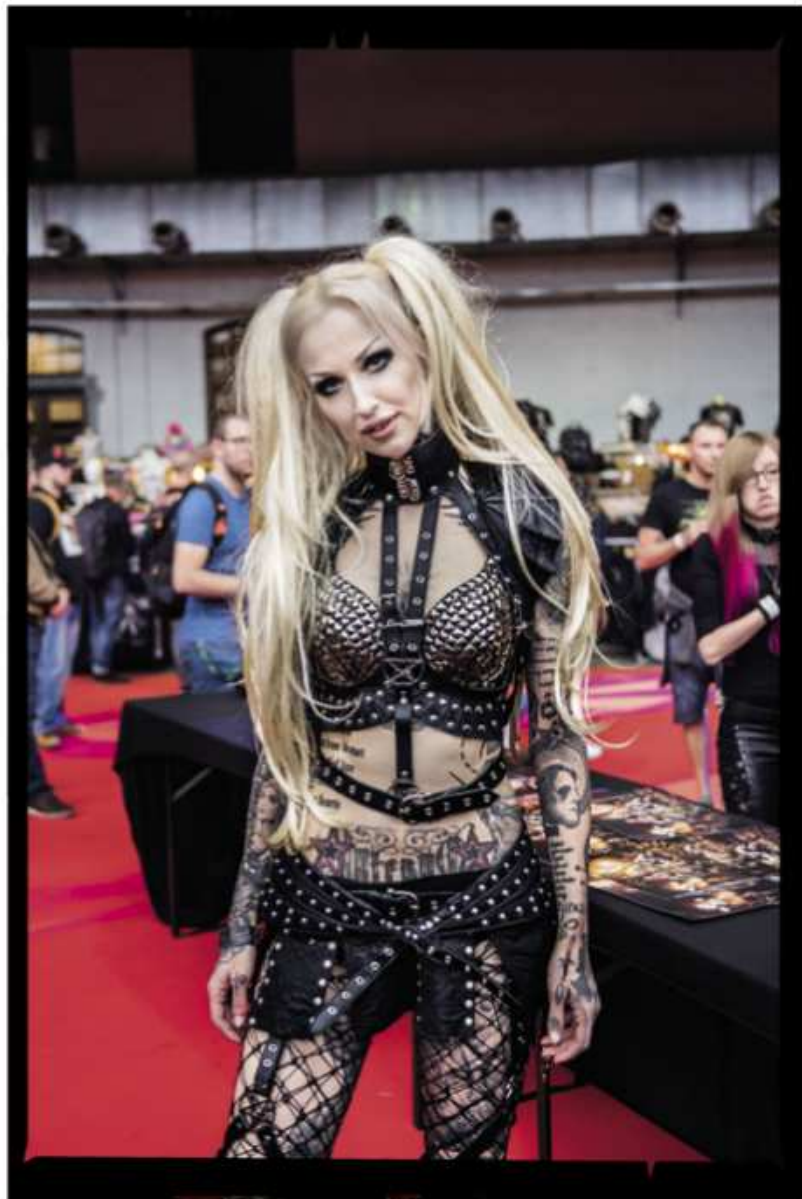
Based on this, I can make the very honest and exact statement that the future is looking sharper than ever. If you can drag yourself away from TV shows delivering average tattooing/fixing under pressure to appease advertisers and stop scrolling through the feeds of thousands of people waving in vain at you for a moment, you'll find a world that has pushed forward another generation for the better... and that hasn't always been the case.

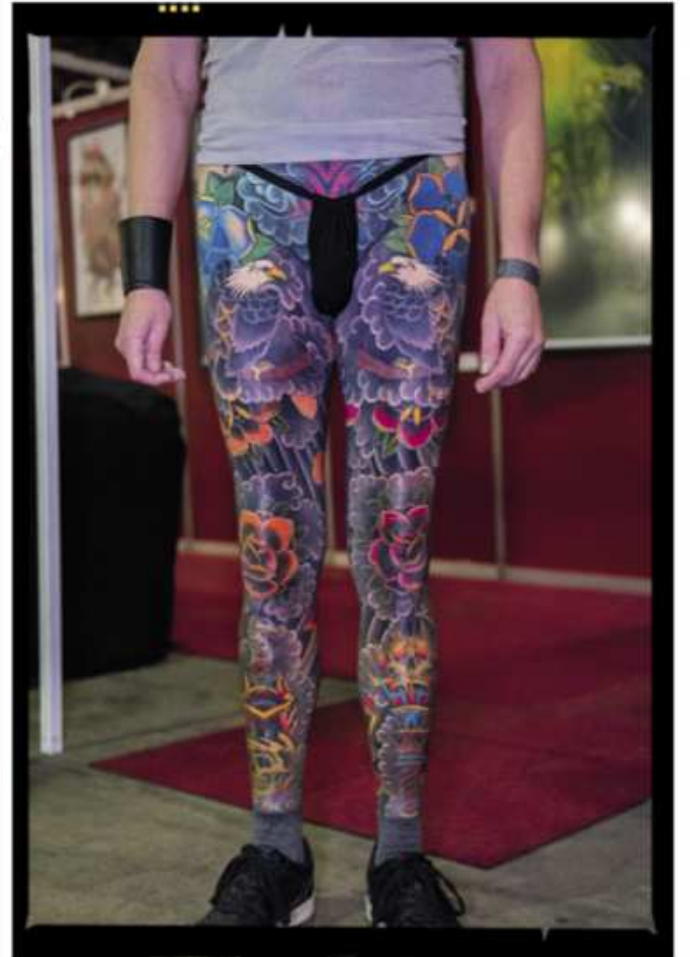
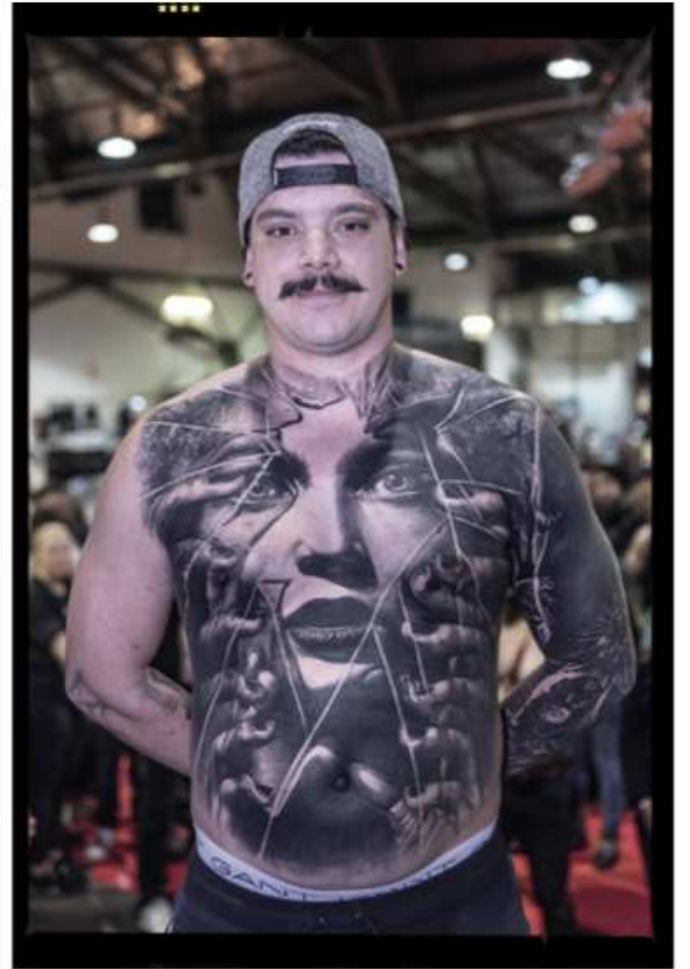
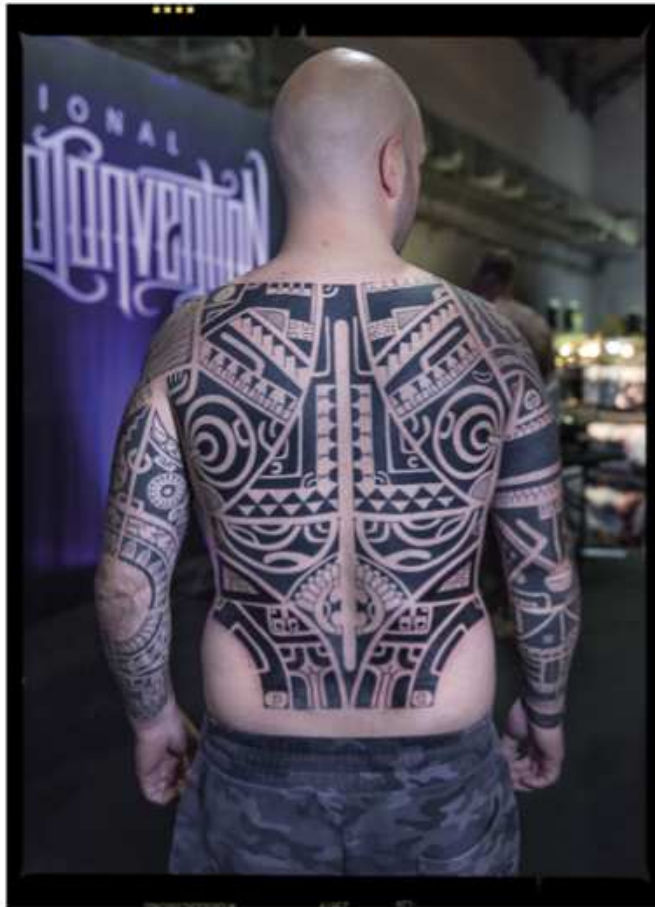
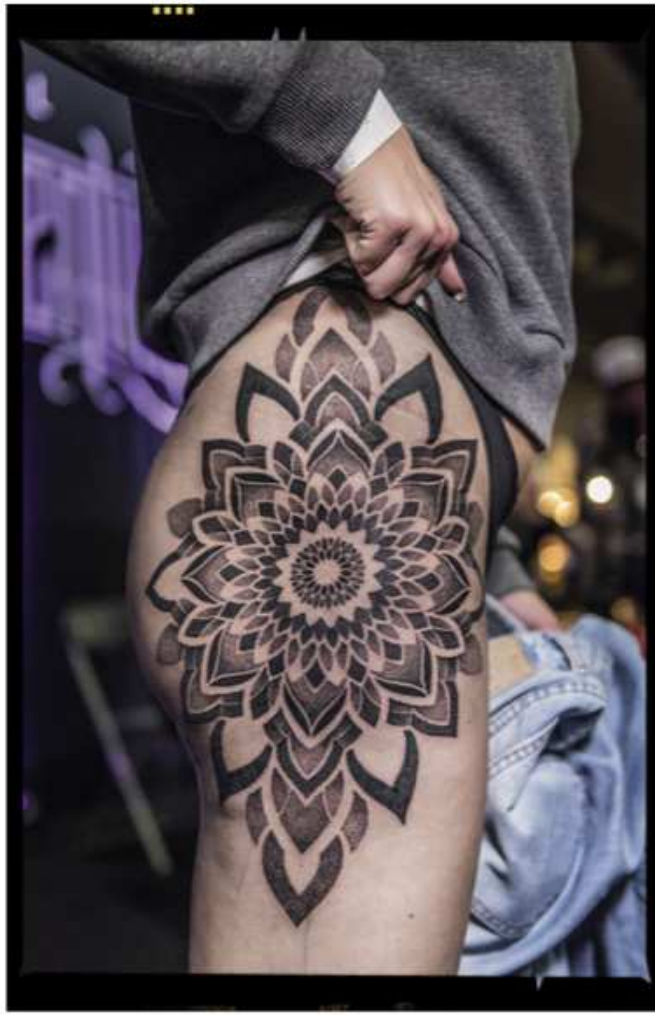
There are tattooers out there pushing at the boundaries of what you can have on your body at a serious pace.

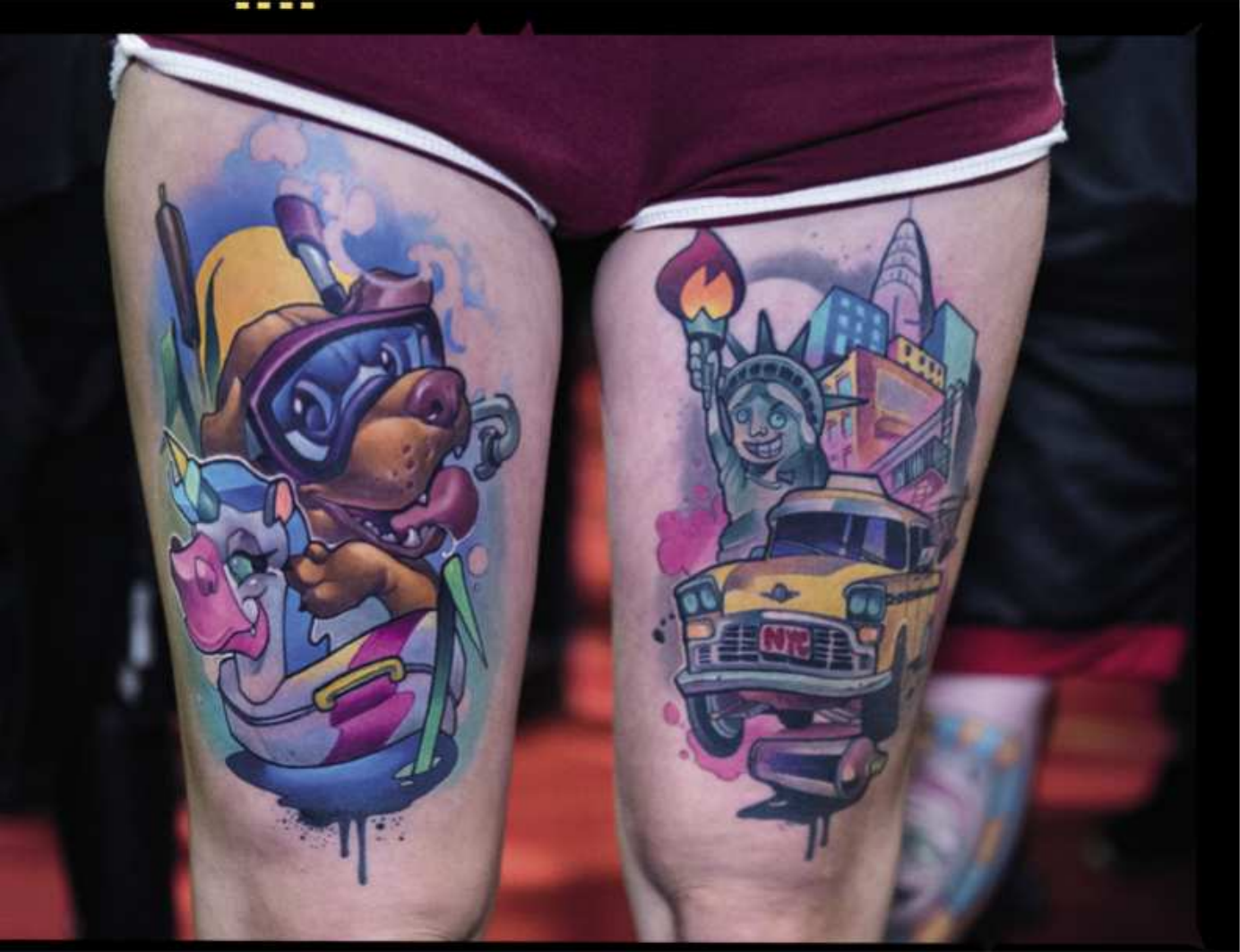
Anyway, Brussels: somebody is going to have really twist that volume knob to get much better than this.

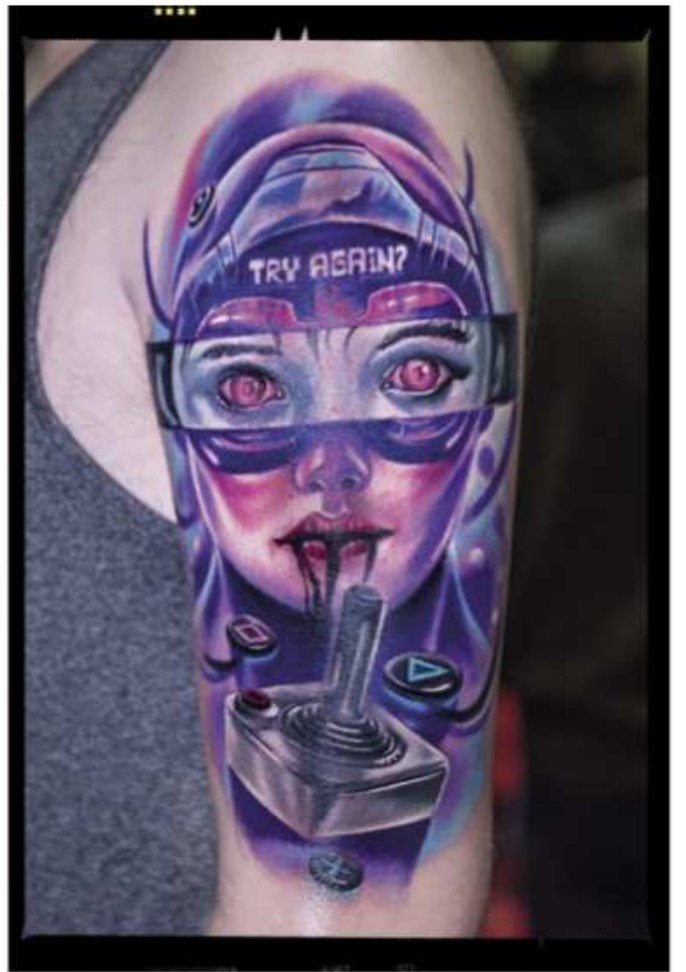
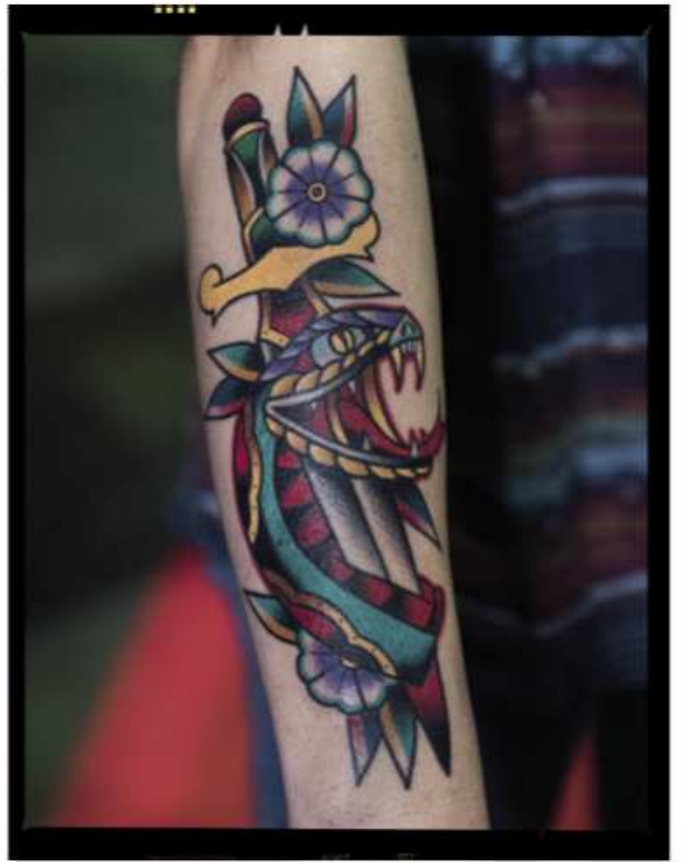
Thanks as ever to the mighty Kamila Burzymowska and her camera skills for being my wing-walker this weekend.















REVIEW

TATTOOED BEAUTIES

Photographer: Christian Saint

Publisher: GOLIATH

ISBN: 978-3-95730-042-3

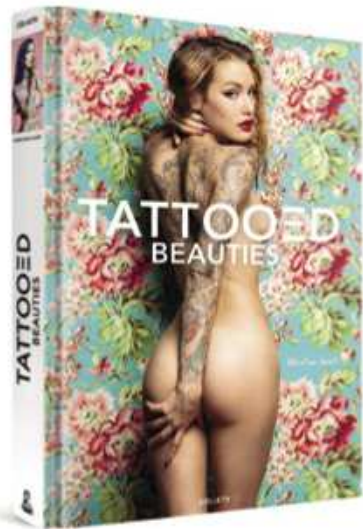
Size: 16 x 24 cm / 6 1/4" x 9 1/2"

Pages: 256 · Photos: 250

Hardcover · Preis / Price: £32.99 GBP

contact@goliathbooks.com

www.goliathbooks.com



Goliath Books are making quite a name for themselves publishing material on the outer reaches of what many would deem to be an acceptable coffee table book, but a closer look will reveal their books relating to tattooing have an awful lot to offer hardcore collectors. In *Tattooed Beauties*—their latest offering—Christian Saint takes fifty tattooed models and strips them naked to reveal their tattoo collections.

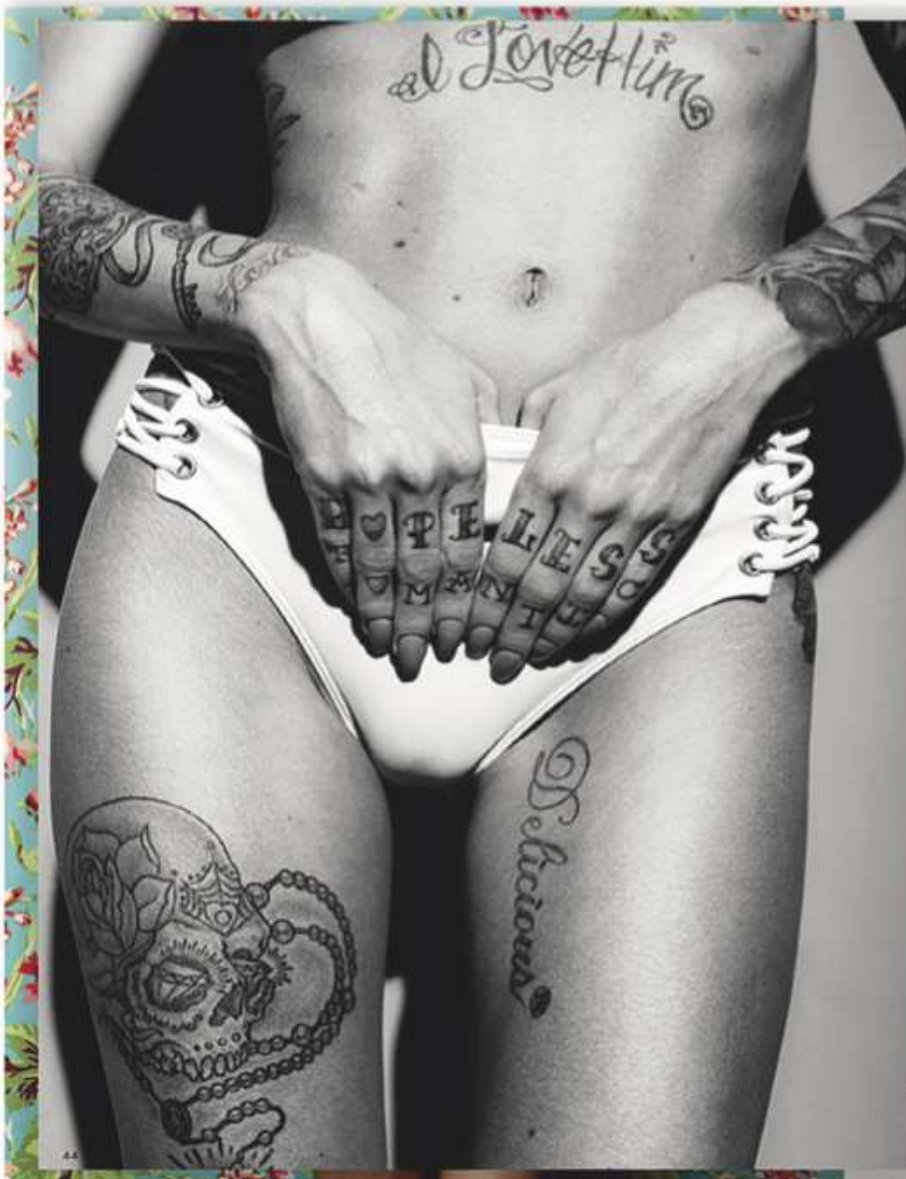
With over 150 artists contributing to the project over a three year period, it's important if only for that... but come on... you know what you're getting just from this limited preview of the title—we even chose the tamest of

the bunch to give you a taster of the book.

From an art point of view, there's some fantastic tattoos featured along the way (check out that artist list) and sure, there's some not so good work too, but we all have our journey of 'getting better along the way' to portray. Thankfully (probably) most of us will never have the balls to leave our clothes on the back of a chair to prove it.

Production wise, as with all Goliath books, it's up there amongst the best the world has to offer and the price is not something to be sniffed at either.

For full ordering details and more images from the internal pages, head on over to goliathbooks.com



Tattoo artists work appearing in the book: Adam France, Adam Hathorn, Adam Machin, Alex McWatt, Amy MyMouse, Anderson Luna, Andre Malcolm, Andy Blanco, Andy Robinson, Antony Flemming, Ashley Wiesel, Atom Messmer, Autumn Hudson, Bart Bingham, Beau Brady, Becca Roach, Benjamin Laukis, Big Steve, Bill Keithley, Bob Jones, Boog Brown, Carla Hopkins, Carl Löfqvis, Carlos Torres, Chad Bjorn, Chad Newsom, Chad Pelland, Charlie Forbes, Charlie Webster, Chris Hebert, Chris O'Donnell, Civ, Connor Garrity, Cricket Elijah, Cervidae, Dan Mcwolfe, Daniel Albrigo, Daniel Kulagin, David Allen, David Sena, Deno Tattoo, Derek Ward, Dillon Forte, Doug Sparks, Dustin Kendig, Ele Mags, Faty Tattoo, Fernando Bisceglia, Frank at Philadelphia Eddie's, Garth Hixon, Gentle Jay Blondel, Gentle Jay Blondel, Gerald Feliciano, Gustavo Rizerio, Handex, Herb Auerbach, Horiyoshi III, Ian Dana Camp, Ian Laughlin, Jacob Crowder, Jacob Pederson, Gentle Jay Blondel, Gerald Feliciano, Gustavo Rizerio, Handex, Herb Auerbach, Horiyoshi III, Ian Dana Camp, Ian Laughlin, Jacob Crowder, Jacob Pederson and 100 more.



Models appearing in the book: Abbey So, Alesandra Nicole, Alisha Gory, Amanda Pemberton, Amelia Nightmare, Anesthesia Awful, Autumn Hudson, Bambu Jessica, Bibiana Atada, Bonnie Rotten, Brittany Bao, Brittany Hetzer, Chelsea Nyegaard, Cleo Wattenström, Dani Vi, Danielle Otrakji, Diana Carolina, Emily Shephard, Fallon Ven Detta, Gabriella Saturai, Hannah Raymond, Hayley G, Heidi Lavon, Jennifer Lynn, Jessa Jordan, Jesse Lee D, Jessica Wilde, Karla Lambert, Kay Reynolds, Kayte Rae, Kelly Eden, Kybele, Leah Jung, Leila Rose, Leza Lush, Lily, Linette Otero, Linnea Thomasia, Maegan Machine, Vanessa Lake, Phay Moss and more.

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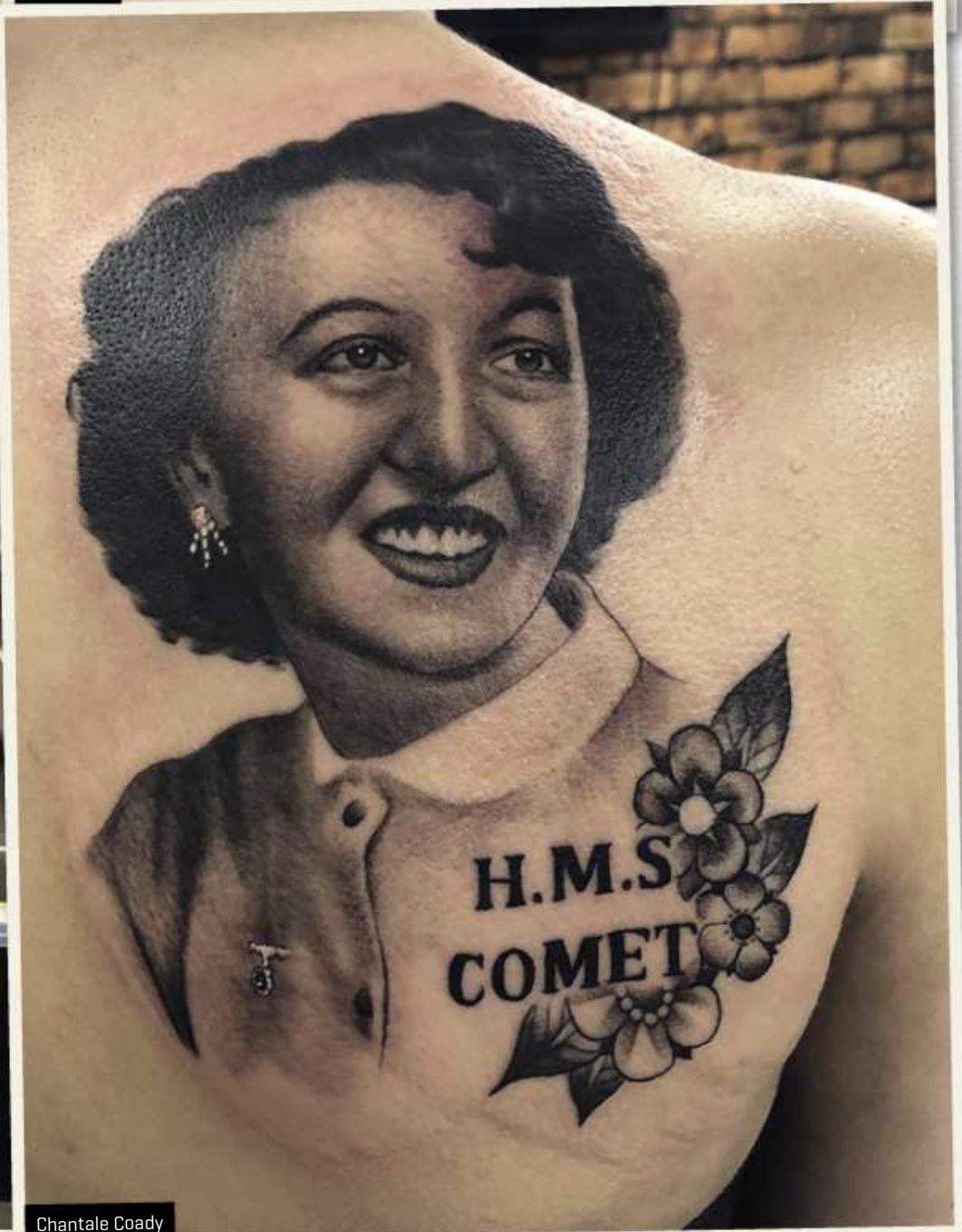
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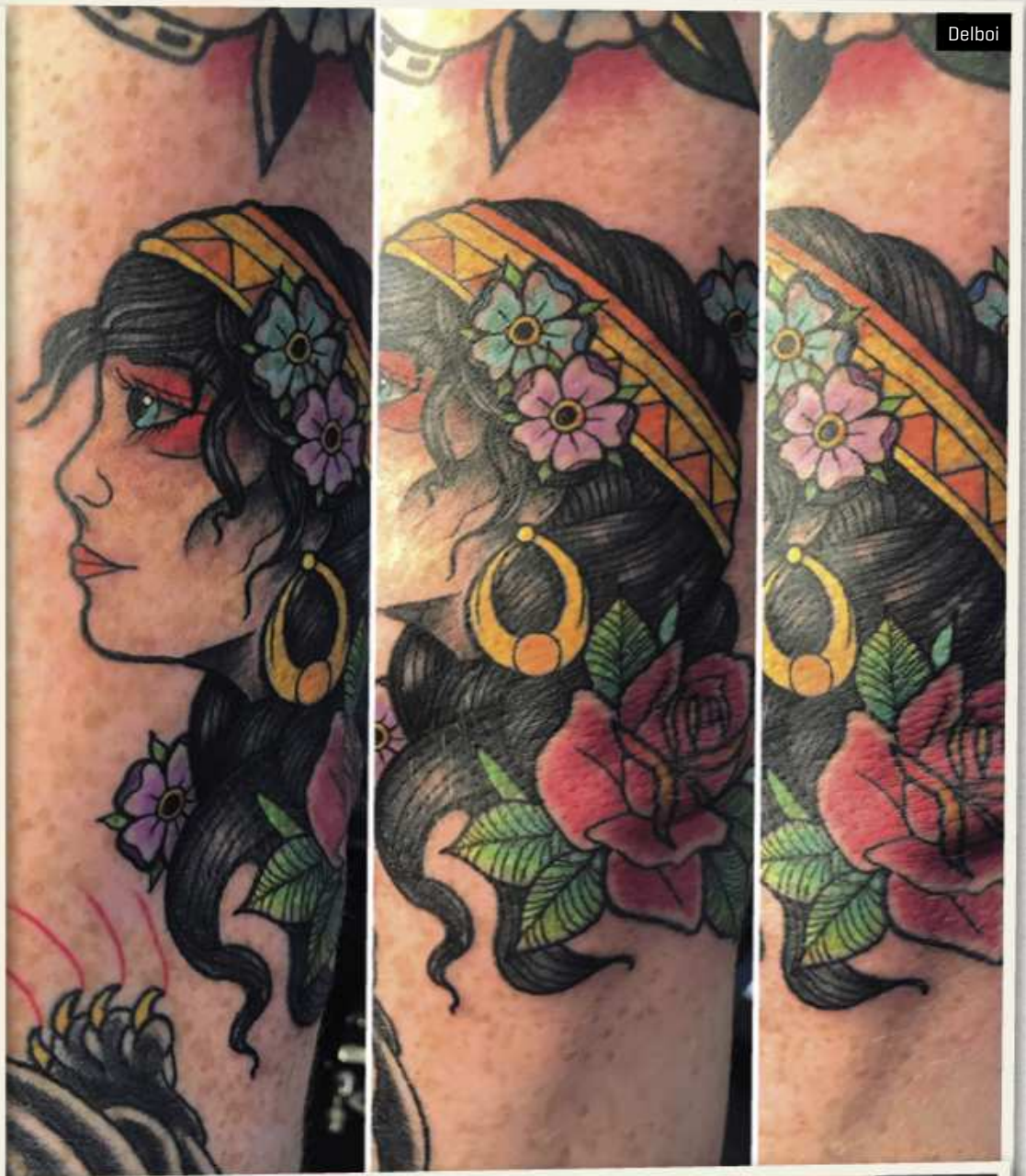
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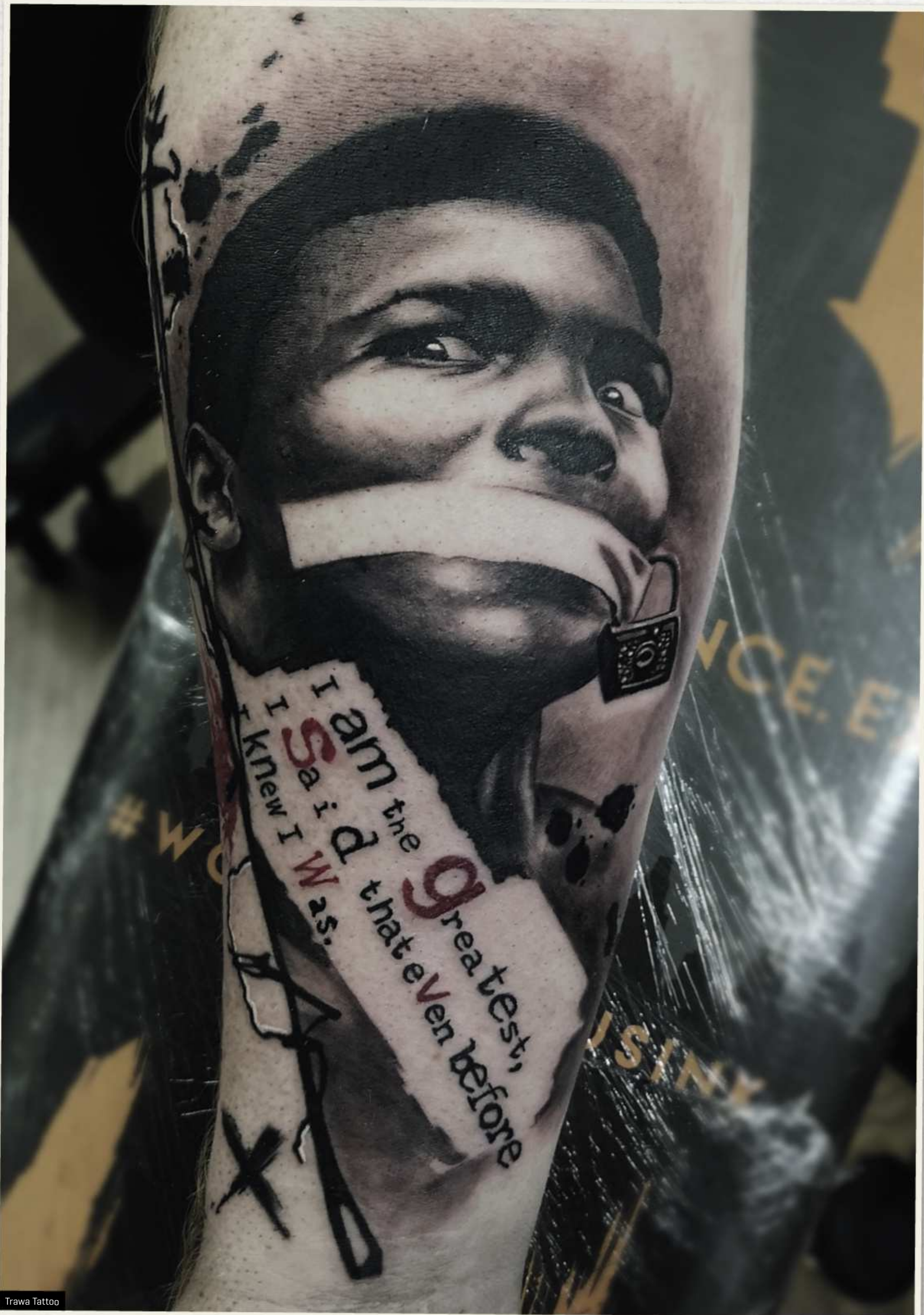


Dale McGovern



Chantale Coady





Trava Tattoo



Franky Leigh Coombs



Georgia Jay



Lily Hargreaves



J Betts

Jon Potter



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Leigh Coombs



Shona Lynne



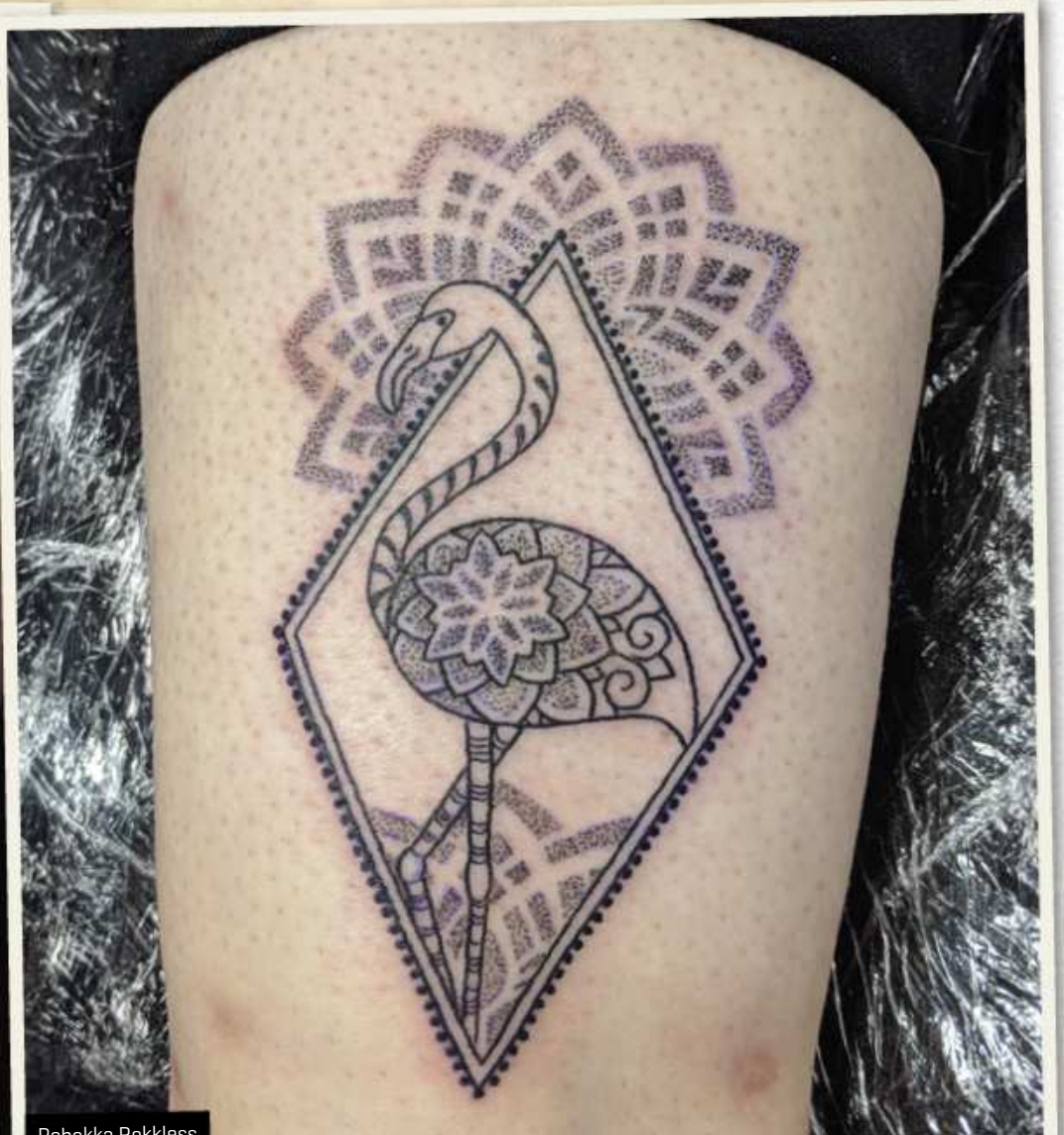
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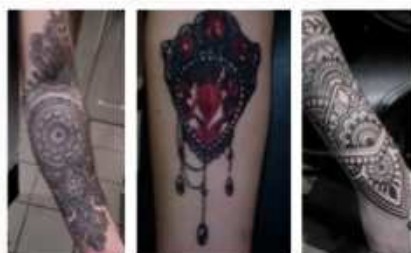
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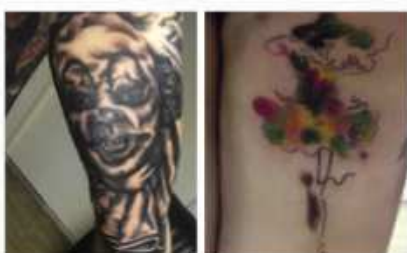


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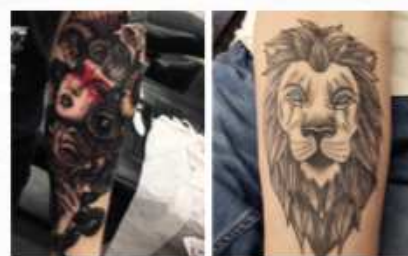
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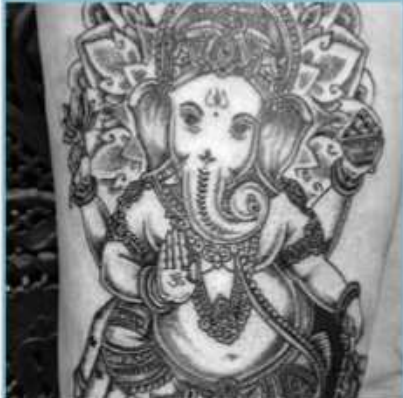
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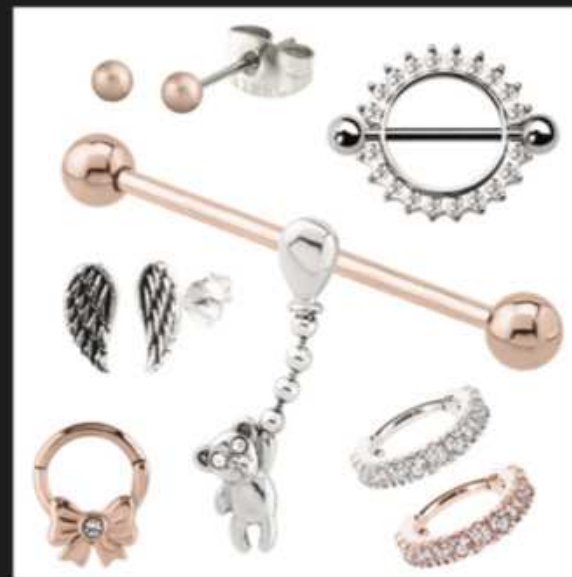
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