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SEAN HERMAN • CONIO
MARIE ROURA • BREN KELLY
TATTOO FREEZE 2019
ANDREAS VRONTIS
ŁUKASZ KALIŃSKI

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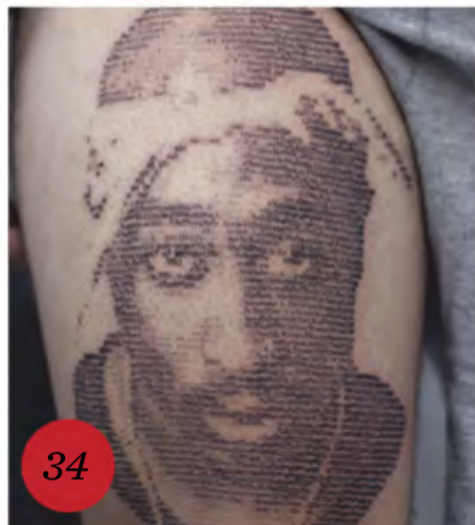
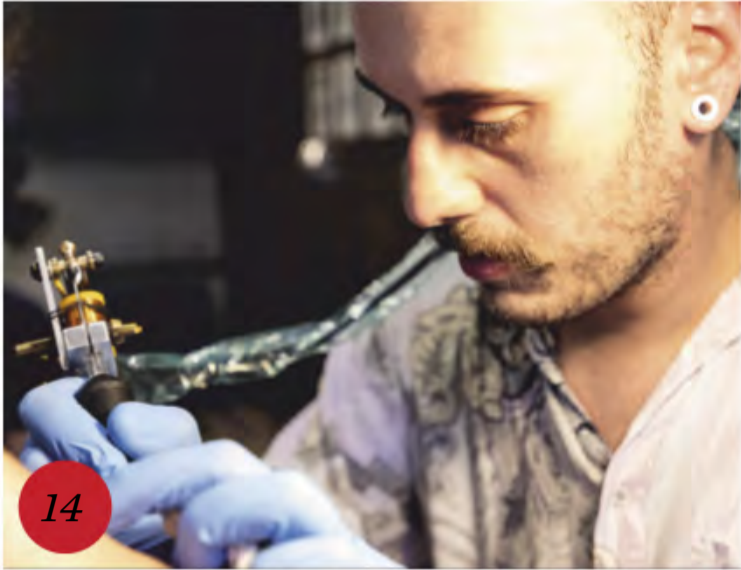
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Dragonfly



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Vrontis, the realms reached through his own experimentation changed the focus of his work forever.

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Over the last few years, Rakhee Shah has changed her outlook somewhat on what she is doing within the world of tattooing and also in her own head, most recently working up a series of custom zodiac designs. Peachy!

60 PUNCTURED

Mr Smith meets Mr Poole: Stick two old friends who are roughly the same age on either side of a breakfast table and let the tape run. Both detest social media and what it's doing to tattooing, both have been brought up on comics and cartoons, both look like HG Wells created them, both have something to say and both of them should know better.

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Tarot cards are synonymous with our understanding of the occult; mystical objects used for divinatory purposes. Their iconic designs are believed by some to recount the past, examine the present, and foretell the future, the latter a terrifying unveiling of potential doom.

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Wayne Simmons continues his pilgrimage, going deep into the hills to unearth tattooers with a penchant for the mystical. This month he meets French artist Marie Roura.

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Tattoo Art by Jess Yen



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-  Immovable Light
-  Immovable Medium
-  Immovable Dark
-  Lantern Yellow
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-  Moma Peach
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Jess Yen



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Jess Yen's art brings a dynamic realism to the culture and stories of Asian traditions. Under his touch, the creatures of Japanese and Chinese mythology flow with life, alive with detail, shadow and light. Working together, Jess Yen and Eternal Ink formulated these tattoo pigments to a thinner ink consistency suitable for both traditional and tebori tattoo styles.



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SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING



Ali Burke

The Devil of Hell's Kitchen

Issue 300. We made it! I feel the need for an extended editorial.

Last time I did that was back in issue 200 but if we say that some of you readers have just turned 18, that would make you just 10 when that came out, so I won't hold my breath over you remembering it... which means I can freely repeat myself (a little) because everybody else will be old, grey and they won't remember what I said either, thus:

IF IT'S GREAT WORK, THERE'S A HOME FOR YOU HERE...



SION SMITH • EDITOR
editor@skindeep.co.uk

Thanks to all the brilliant artists that have ever contributed to Skin Deep over the years (we don't let just anybody in), to my crack team of writers and photographers for being among the smartest out there, to all you people who ever picked up a copy, to the admin staff at the office who make sure people get



SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING

paid and that stuff makes it into the mail, to all the people who have ever come to a show, from supporting advertisers across the board—right down to the little newsagents that stock it for us... thanks.

None of it would be worth a damn without you.

300 issues is no mean feat for what started out as a niche magazine and grew into a monster with a great reputation around the world. I did the *'we are standing on the shoulders of giants'* thing 100 issue ago, so I'm not doing it again... the goal at that point was to become the giant. You can be the judge of that but if you're reading, I'll take it as a good sign.

Meanwhile, in another world, there might also be a few people who I wouldn't thank very much at all. Like those who send me emails accusing us of rigging the judging at our shows or giving those awards only to people who advertise. That's just not us. I've heard it happens out there but not on my watch mthfrk. By being a sore loser, all you're doing is raining on the parade of your peers... and they have even longer memories for such things than I do.

And maybe in private moments, I also wouldn't thank another magazine who thought it was cool to throw stones at us in print, but I've never paid much attention to people who say they run a magazine when they can barely spell.

Like I say... that's in another world and I'm not going to enter that world by giving Those Who Lick The Earth lip service. The rules here are the same as they have always been since the day I started. All any of us want to see is great work by wonderful, forward thinking artists—brought to you by people who know what they are doing with pens and cameras. We can do that. If it's great work, there's a home for you here... it might take us a while to get around to everybody on the planet, but so far so good.

While I remember, I will also tip my hat to whoever was on the production crew of the episode of *Silent Witness* from a few weeks back (it's called *'To Brighton'*) in which a casual viewer could learn more about authentic tattooing from just that one episode than they ever could watching *Tattoo Fixers*. Sad but true. I was impressed at how they pulled that off.



Ali Burke

HAVE EQUAL AMOUNTS OF INTEGRITY
WITH YOURSELF AND WITH YOUR
CLIENTS. ALWAYS PUSH FOR BETTER AND
YOU WON'T GO FAR WRONG

I've been thinking hard lately—not a pretty sight—about where to take the magazine next. We've covered a lot of ground over the last 100 issues following a trail of clues around the world in search of the best the industry—or community, if you prefer—has to offer. Maybe it's time we brought this home and spent the next 100 issues whipping around this country, unearthing what we've got going on right here under our noses. There's some serious talent coming out of the woodwork that's for sure... maybe I should work on tipping the balance in that direction.

On which subject, being as it's 300 and everything, I figured I would wander back in my own timeline and make an effort to feature some long standing friends (who I have known since I first began here) to see what they were doing these days. Friends they may be, but some of them I haven't seen for years... busy, busy and all that.

It's always tough having friends who tattoo when you do this job because everybody thinks you're just featuring them because you *are* friends—consequently, I end up not featuring them as much as I would like to avoid such things. Of the three pieces I've written for this issue, I don't think I've featured any of them in at least five years—



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SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING

which is a lifetime in tattooing.

What's been interesting about it is how little has changed whilst watching everything change.

All three of them are standing on the very strong foundations they built for themselves when they started out though. If you're new out there, that's good advice. Have equal amounts of integrity with yourself and with your clients. Always push for better on a daily basis and you won't go far wrong.

Pretty damn simple but you'd be surprised how many can't hold such a basic equation together along the way.

Talking of integrity, I saw first hand this week what artists are putting up with from clients with very little of that integrity. Turning up with a phone screen and asking for 'this' is not what modern tattooing is about. If I never see another huge black and grey eye on the inside of a bicep it will be too soon.

You can also add that tiger-face-thing-with-blue-eyes-on-the-forearm, messy under-boob mandalas (the tribal of our age), Jack Sparrow, Alice in Wonderland (or any other Johnny Depp related character), the Joker... there are too many to name but you all know what I'm talking about.

It makes me sad. Sad and disappointed. Disappointed that we have this huge freaking world of wonder, technology and great artists at our disposal and the best some people can come up with is to ask for a copy of a copy of a copy. Of a copy.

Maybe it's time to look on the second page of the Google search results just to make me happy? There are worse things you could do.

Looking the other way in time (aka: The Future) I think there will be changes aplenty out there too soon—and I said this a couple of years back too. I suspect tattooing will go back underground. Right now, it's huge. It's everywhere we look and tattooing wasn't meant to be that way. As is always the case, what 'this generation' thinks is the greatest thing in the world, the 'next generation' will rebel against. It's how the human race has played the game since time began.

Integral to this rebalancing of the scales as it disappears, will be an exodus from the internet. Private studios will become the norm. They will be found by word of mouth and be



Max Pniewski

WHAT 'THIS GENERATION' THINKS IS THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD, THE 'NEXT GENERATION' WILL REBEL AGAINST

owned by those who love the craft of tattooing. Those who got into the game to only make money will be left behind—or at least, creatively starved.

A good start would be to turn the internet off... and I would say that such a thing is never going to happen and then today, I read in the news that Turn It Off is exactly what Russia are going to do for a little while. Brilliant. That would sort a whole ton of issues many of us have when it comes to tattooing vs the internet.

Anyway, that's that then. As soon as I put the final full stop in this editorial, I have to move on to issue 301... and so the world keeps turning, but before I go, here's three things to remember never to forget:

Be Cool To Each Other.

Life Is Short—Leave A Scar.

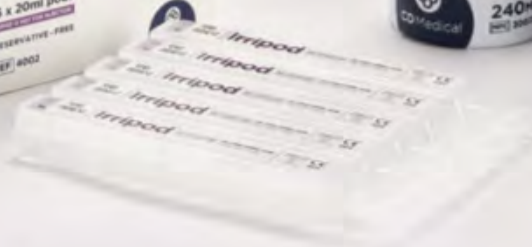
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Sometimes there's nothing wrong with a bit of distraction...

I had been lying on my back for about ten minutes, trying desperately to concentrate on my breathing and not the location of my doctor's roaming fingers. Suddenly, a midwife swung into the room to keep me company, grabbed my hand and instantly started quizzing me about my colourful body. I could have kissed her. I threw myself into chatting about my collection: my favourites, which was the most recent, how long they took, which body part hurt the most, and more. I then welcomed hearing about her own experiences in return.

A year or so ago, I would have written (and undoubtedly did write in fact) about how infuriating it can be sometimes to play victim to the non-stop-tattoo-inquisition—how our painted scars are often the first thing people see, how we're constantly asked annoying questions, how we can't even relax in the sauna after a long day of work without someone desperately needing to know the price, location, length, meaning and artist of every single piece of ink in their vision. But during my afternoon on this hospital bed, I turned to my left and smiled. Her questioning had successfully distracted me from the discomfort of the procedure.

It got me thinking about all of the times in the last nine months that my tattoos have encouraged light relief from the overwhelming strain of medical testing and environments. In fact, upon reflection, I realised that throughout my pregnancy (during which countless healthcare professionals have seen me half-naked) I've rarely made it through an appointment, scan, blood-test or whatever without someone making a remark about a tattoo. And, unusually, I haven't minded once.

I think this is partly due to a woman's pregnancy journey and what it does to her in terms of sharing anything and everything with others. After nine months of exhibiting every inch of my physical and mental being to strangers on a weekly basis, after talking in detail regularly about my blood, piss, shit, discharge, milk and whatever else... babbling on to someone about a simple tattoo doesn't get a second thought. A few months ago, during a breastfeeding session with a trained counsellor, I didn't hesitate to lift up my top to flash her a peek at the hand-



Laura Firth

OUR TATTOOS CAN BE EXCELLENT MECHANISMS FOR GETTING CLOSER TO OTHER HUMAN BEINGS, AND THAT'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE



REBECCA GIVENS

poke mandalas that adorned my chest. "Hey, I bet you'll like my boob tattoos, check these out..." I pronounced, no concern for the dripping nipples that sat at the centre of my gorgeous dot-work pieces. She'd seen it all before.

Pregnancy aside, I've also come to appreciate in the last few years that our tattoos can be excellent mechanisms for getting closer to other human beings, and that's definitely something to celebrate. Last week in hospital, as I lay strapped to various machines, it gave me such warmth to look away from the physical wires and notice the invisible connections forming, the ones between me and another woman, the ones that would aid me through a pretty crappy few hours. It's during moments like these when we realise that our tattoos are worth so much more than face value. To say these marks on my skin are 'a conversation starter' would be somewhat of an understatement—they are gateways into my soul, windows into my experiences, pathways that lead to everything and everyone around me. ▣

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Who are you?

Self-expression has been around for thousands of years. Through art, music and writing, long before the modern alphabet, people have sought to express who they are...

Art in the traditional sense often took the form of drawing, painting and sculpting, changing dramatically from around the 1860s onwards to encompass endless objects and possibilities, to be examined and interpreted. As human beings, we have a desire to belong, but also to convey our individuality within that collective. These various forms of expression have always served the purpose of sharing something of significance, be it an experience, a feeling, opinions, values, or part of oneself.

Many people go through life without questioning it, without taking the time to search for deeper meaning or understanding. They accept the norm as it is presented to them, without wondering whether it is the only option. Self-expression through various art forms has always been a channel for certain individuals to explore concepts and ideas that go beyond the tasks and activities of everyday life. Although tattoos are not quite as modern as we may think them to be, their popularity and acceptance symbolises a change within our society, and the way that individual expression which strays from a sense of conformity is perceived.

Clothing was always the go to for the expression of one's personal identity and individuality. Cloth-



My name is Shoshi Winstanley-Brown and I am a style coach and life coach. When I first found myself in the working world, I heavily compromised who I was, my sense of freedom and self-expression, to fit in with society and the working culture. I later made the decision to prioritise who I really was and find another way. Now I help people whose lives or image are not in line with who they really are. Sometimes a concept is so ingrained within us that we can't differentiate between reality and belief. We make assumptions about our lack of options and avoid the meaningful questions while focusing on our current reality. I help people to question their values and belief systems, and to find real happiness through being honest about who they are and what they want on a deeper level. I help them to work through what's holding them back and keeping them from what they want. Life is not about making choices based on what everyone else is doing. It's about how we would honestly choose to live, if every element of fear, doubt and uncertainty were taken away.
shoshiwinstanleybrown.com

ing, accessories and haircuts. Clothing is often chosen in line with the current trends, sometimes we purposely choose what we know bucks that trend. Accessories are worn in accordance with a particular style. Haircuts may be long, short or extreme in some way. Even then, venturing beyond the expected form of dress was generally confined to particular genres or minorities who made a conscious choice to live outside the norm.

The choice was simple. To live within the norm or outside of it. Choosing the latter could carry with it very practical consequences, as within certain working environments, conformity was, and in many ways still is expected. Except now we have another option, beyond those that were previously open to us. Our bodies are no longer merely mannequins but canvases. Rather than rely on cloth and fabric, we have another option. Our clothing and our style tell on-lookers how we view ourselves. They express our values, our perspective. Through ink we have the ability to take it a step further. Our style is one image, but tattoos are many. They allow us to express ourselves openly in a way that was not previously possible. They allow us to tell our stories.

Many of us, myself included, view our image as an opportunity, not just



Sven Groenewald

for expression but for honesty and openness. A way of being real. We all have a very unique perspective. Tattoos allow us to really wear that honesty about who we are. Not through a means that can be removed or replaced when it's appropriate depending on where we are and who we're with, but as a permanent depiction of our interests, our experiences and what's important to us in our lives. Expressing this, however, involves much more than the individual. It is with our tattoo artist, with their comprehension of who we are and what we want, that we are able to co-create a design that is an undeniable representation of who we are. What they do for us goes beyond the making of art. It's the creation of a vision. Our personal vision of how we see the world. That is what they help us in creating.

Tattoos are no longer reserved for one group within society. They are

now much more in the public eye, with many celebrities extensively tattooed in various styles. There are, of course, varying degrees to which people choose to use tattoos as part of their image. For some, it's more simplistic. A small, subtle suggestion. Easily concealed, hidden from most people, while they know of its existence and its meaning. For others, it goes much further. Elaborate and easily noticed works of art, with or without colour, on full display for anyone who is interested in observing and guessing at the meaning and reasoning behind their choice of design.



But for everyone who chooses to be tattooed to any degree, the choice, the design, the size, the placement, says a lot about who they are. Bringing tattoos into the forefront has participated in something much greater than just the tattoo industry itself. It has changed the way people think about individuality. It has served to break with the traditional mentality that one must conform. There is no longer one choice, conformity or failure to conform. In many places and situations, dress codes remain prevalent.

We are still expected to follow a certain level of convention. In many industries, to be suited and booted, as it were, is still the norm. A lot of employers expect tattoos to be covered. To be dressed unconventionally and tattooed extensively is still looked on with judgement by many. Yet there is a wider sense of acceptance, and this relates not only to our image, but to where we have arrived in the evolution of our society. There's an acceptance of culture, gender, sexuality. Every part of ourselves can be conceived as the expression of our individual perspective. We do make choices in terms of our actions and reactions, but the rest is all part of who we are.

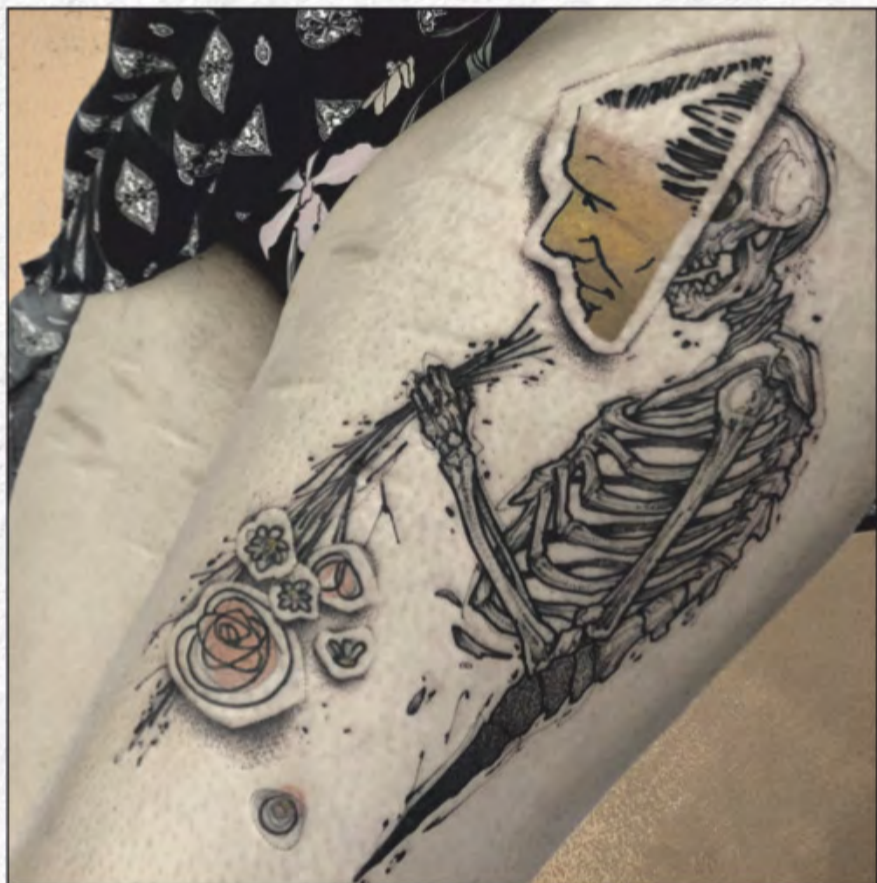
We can choose not to express it, but hiding from our own truth and failing to live authentically creates a space where people are restricted and missing any sense of what it really means to be alive. The world we are in now is starting to recognise, to a greater extent, the worth in our differences. The tattoo industry and their artists have played a prominent role in this shift. Their art has allowed for our honest expression, our collective creativity. We have started to experiment with a newfound sense of freedom and possibility. And we have shifted from a society that asks us to fit into a box, an ideal of what and who we should be, to one that allows the individual to write their own narrative. ▣

REBEL INC.

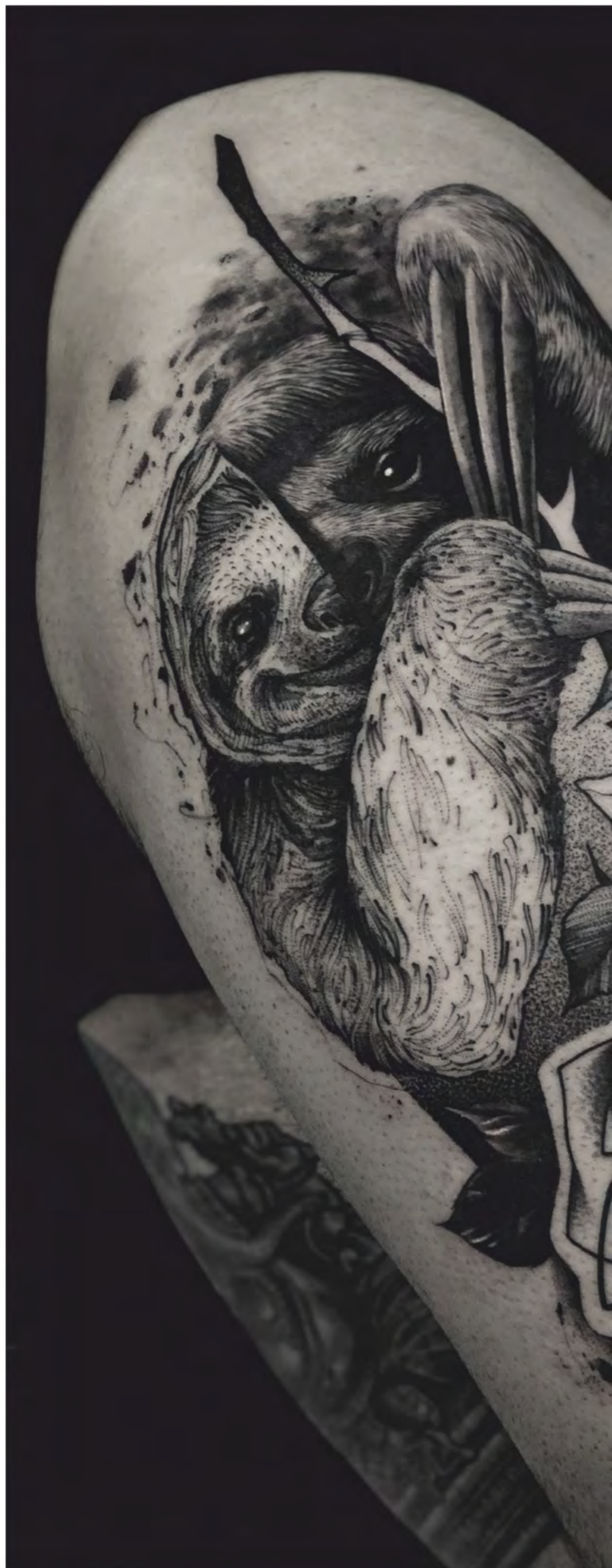
Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing. This month he meets Conio of Polifamous Tattoo Atelier in Milan

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Collaboration is a fundamental part of tattoo art. In a way, every tattoo is a collaboration, of course—between the artist and the client, between the needle and the skin, between the ink and the blood. But it's more than that—art itself is in perpetual collaboration with anyone who interacts with it. When you visit a tattoo studio, when you go to a convention, even just flicking through the pages of this very magazine is a form of engagement: you're communing, collaborating with the rest of the tattoo community and the art that drives it.



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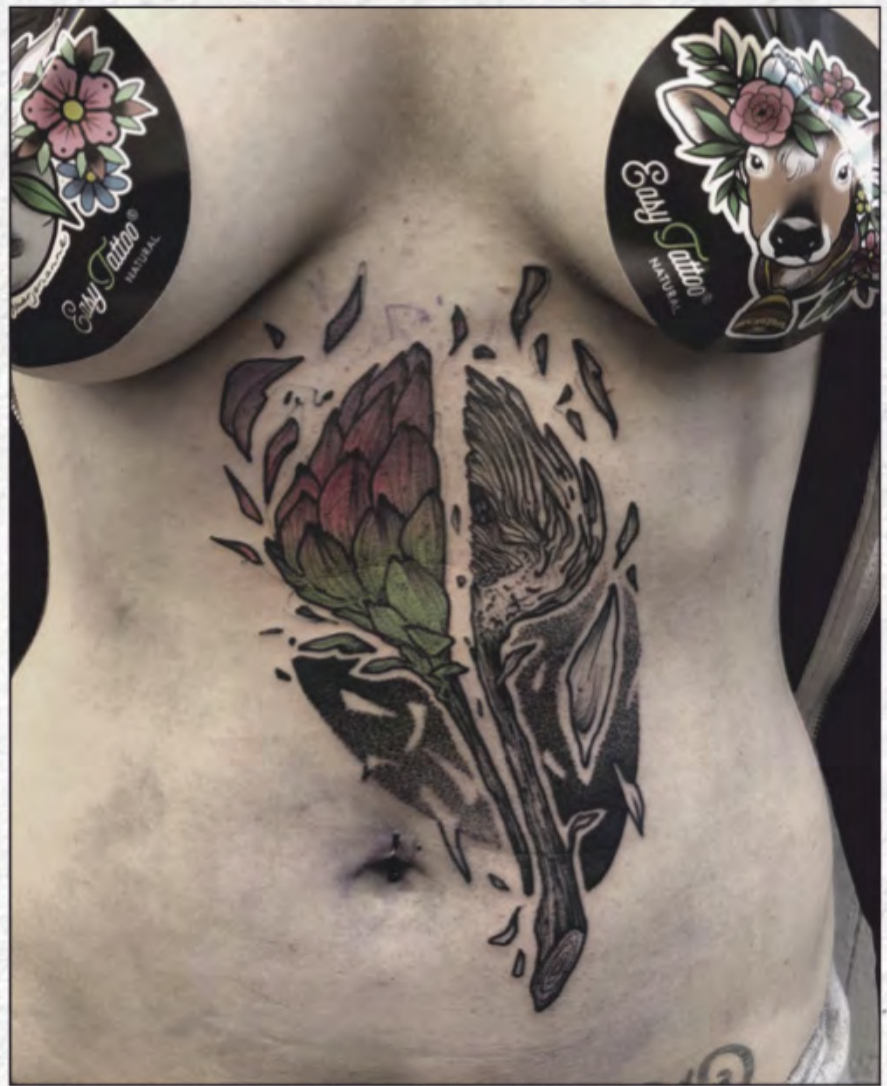


A GOOD REPRESENTATION OF AN ANIMAL NEEDS TO BRING OUT THEIR DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS AND BEHAVIOURS

It's a powerful sentiment and one perhaps echoed by this month's Rebel Incer, Conio. Working out of his own studio, Polifamous Tattoo Atelier in Milan, Conio sees community and collaboration as an important part of being a tattoo artist.

I sat down to talk with him about his work in Milan and all across the globe.

Hi Conio! This series is entitled 'Rebel Inc.' Do you see yourself as a rebel within art and tattooing, someone who purposely sets out to break 'the rules'? Yes, definitely. The traditions within tattooing are obvi-



ously very important, but I always try to be unique and innovative. In fact, I don't belong to any of the popular tattoo styles (traditional, Japanese, realistic etc). I always try to be in the moment while I'm tattooing, I improvise and enrich every tattoo with details I'm inspired by on the spot. I like to do my "sketch effects" in a natural and genuine way.

I can definitely see that quality in your work. Your art seems to bring a blend of fine art influences, such as realism and surrealism, alongside some pop culture references. Does that strike a chord with you? How would you describe your work and its influences?

Some of the art movements that influenced my approach include the 20th Century Avant-Garde movement, from impressionism to pop art. I started tattooing in the traditional way, but over time I took inspiration as much as I could either from art, illustration or innovative tattoo artists. Graphic design is fundamental to what I do. I believe that everything has its own "weight" and has to be balanced with all the various elements in the composition itself, and my graphic design knowledge helps me every day with that. But I can't describe my work with defined words or adjectives, I let each person interpret it in their own way. I create my compositions mixing certain elements such as blackwork, illustration and graphics combined with sketch and gradient dotwork.

You employ all these styles very effectively—often within the same tattoo. I'm curious as to how you became skilled in such a wide variety of techniques and what drives you to keep trying new things.

I like to use both thick and thin lines, sometimes solid and sometimes dotted lines. I use dotwork, full black, gradi-



ents and different textures to create volumes, contrasts and layers. Sometimes I use colours to balance out and provide a certain emphasis for my compositions. Curiosity has always been fundamental to what I do, discovering and learning new skills to improve my work. I never stop exploring new techniques of tattooing.

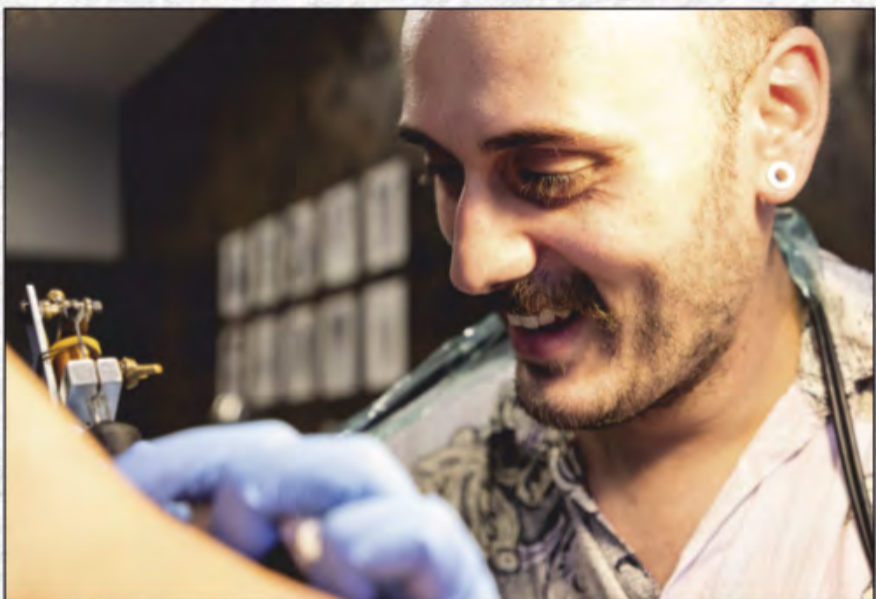
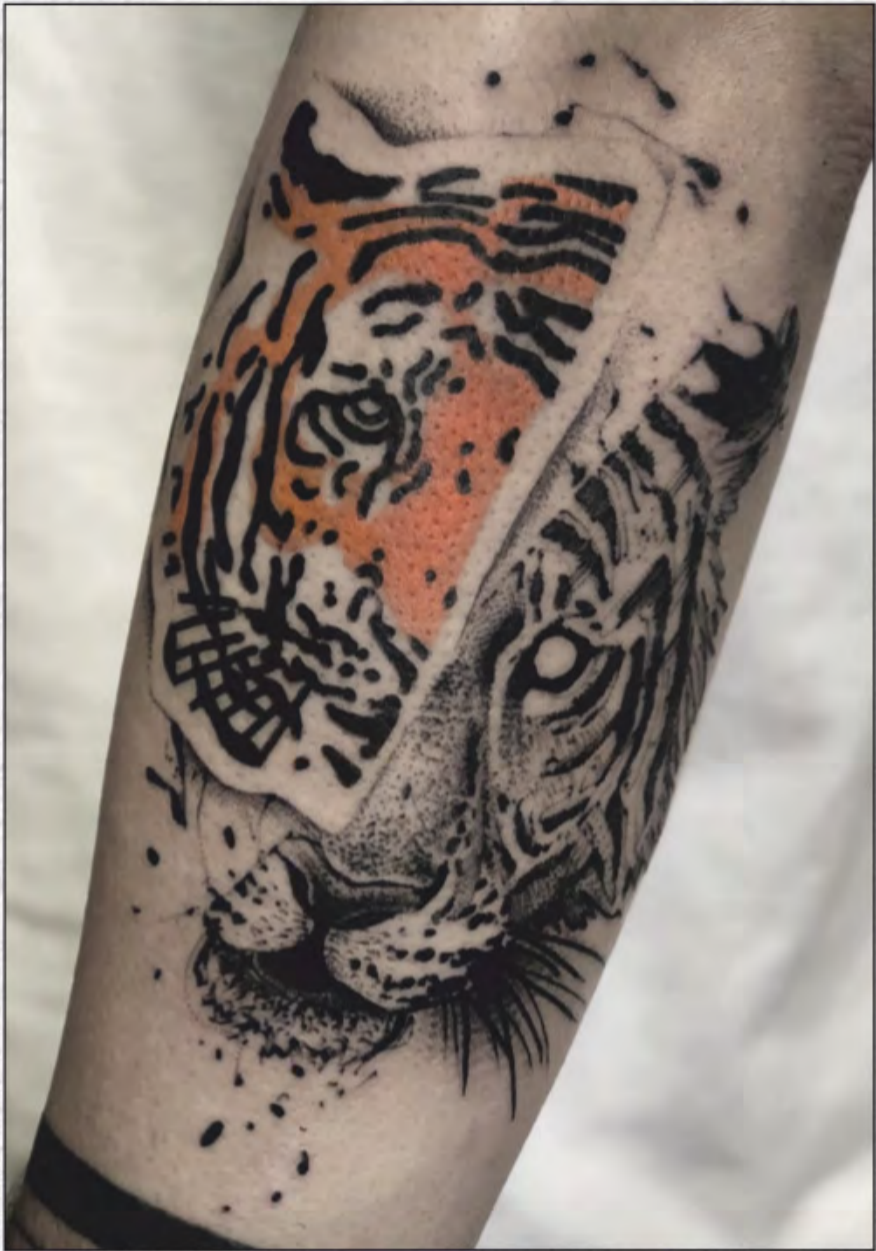
Many of your tattoos focus on people—often famous people—with, for me, an almost ‘shadow’ part of their personality being revealed through your design. Would that be fair to say? What kind of message are you trying to get across when you create these types of tattoos?

Yes, you’re right. In my opinion people are defined by their actions, deeds and thoughts. So when I represent them in my art, I focus on what they did and left to us, instead of

just focusing on how they look. I think the hybrid style I work within is perfect to represent different facets of human beings.

You also seem attracted to animal life, plant life and organic matter such as skulls when you create tattoos—what is the appeal to working with these references? And, again, is there any particular message you seek to get across?

Nature has fascinated me since I was a child. Animals are incredible and are often related to a lot of human personality traits. I don’t like to focus on their canonical meaning within the tattoo world (eg. Lion = strength). In my opinion, a good representation of an animal needs to bring out their distinctive aspects and behaviours. I love to work in a minimalistic way, to emphasise the shapes and consistencies within nature.



A GOOD TATTOO ARTIST NEEDS TO BE FIRST A GOOD DRAWER. I KNOW IT SOUNDS BANAL TO SAY, BUT AT THIS POINT IN TIME I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMIND OURSELVES OF THAT

I think that sometimes, within the more abstract styles such as watercolour, a tattoo can become blurred or scratchy looking and lose that all-important cleanness. This isn't true of your work, however. In what ways do you strive to keep your



work clean? What would be your advice to an artist struggling with this?

I think that a good tattoo artist needs to be first a good drawer. I know it sounds banal to say, but at this point in time I think it's important to remind ourselves of that. To create a composition that works you need a very effective overview, created by playing with contrasts and harmonies of the shapes within the piece. In addition to this, every artist needs to continuously practice and improve all their skills, even the "non-skin" ones. Hear me out, sometimes less is more. This is what I learnt.

Finally, just wondering what your plans are moving forward. Have you any conventions coming up, any exhibitions planned or guest spots at other studios?

Yes I do, this is an aspect of my work that I love. It allows me to meet new people, artists and visit new places. It also gives me the chance to make my art more complete and strong. Indeed, I recently started to do a lot of collaborative projects with great artists such as Caio Miguel and Rems Tattoo, along with my fellow resident artists here in Polifamous Atelier: my sexy La Gatta, the rough Jacopo Uppercut and our beloved but dangerous Marco Odio. I will be at two conventions here in my city, Milan, the bigger in February and a second one in May. Next spring I have planned a two-week tour in France at BSA Tattoo in Aix-en Provence and Regards Noir in Paris. I will then go to Padova to work at my friend Matteo Nangeroni's White Whale Tattoo Society (see Matteo's feature in issue 299—Ed.). Finally I will travel to the centre of Italy to work at different studios. The 25th and the 26th of May will see me attend the Moscow Tattoo Convention, then I will be a guest at the Inkdistrict in Amsterdam. I also really want to plan a guest spot in Australia so I can start a collaboration with one of my great mentors—Chris Rigoni at Bloodlines Ink. ▣



claritas: Creating a fresh canvas for your art

More and more tattoo artists are realising that the days of the old style cover-up could be over—as the latest lasers can fade away old art and quickly and easily create the perfect new canvas to showcase their skills. When artists are asked to do a cover-up, they often recommend that a client first undergo a couple of Picosure sessions giving them great skin quality to work on and a chance to create a new tattoo that is exactly what the client wants—not compromised by the need to hide what's already there.

Tattoo customers researching their next tattoo, are now giving themselves more choice, by including sessions to clear old art as part of their plan. Don't let an old tattoo stand in the way—Picosure will deliver results to give more choice and Claritas Laser Clinic is the answer to achieving that. Planning for a new tattoo is not only choosing the best artist, but fading ink

as well to reveal a fresh new canvas.

At Claritas Laser Clinic, the clinicians use the Picosure laser by Cynosure to quickly remove old ink, whilst preserving the quality of the skin. If an adjustment is all that is required, precision work is possible to allow for partial tattoo removals. The Picosure laser operates at a super-short wavelength, meaning that it works up to three times faster than other lasers and is the **ONLY** laser that effectively shatters **ALL** colours of tattoo ink. The particles of pigment are targeted by pressure waves rather than heat alone, and so minimises skin damage.

Claritas Laser Clinic is conveniently situated in St Neots, just off the A1 and with great road and rail links it is accessible to large areas of the country. There is no need to travel to London to get the latest treatments. At Claritas they take pride in supporting the tattoo industry, promoting the ideal in tattoo artistry. Treat-

ments are delivered by friendly, professional clinicians, with many years experience, giving you the best treatment in their calm and caring clinic. Why not take a look at the gallery of 'before and afters' on their website? And follow them on instagram #claritaslaser

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THE HEALER

In my wanderings through the world of tattooing I occasionally come across a tattooist who is a level above the rest; Bren Kelly is such a tattooist. While other artists are happy to follow the latest media trends or put their heads down and focus on their own creativity Bren is a tattooist determined to give something back to society. I met up with her in an Irish country pub to talk about the healing power of tattoos

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“When people talk about tattooing, most don’t think about the role it can play in cancer treatment,” explains Bren as we settle down in a quiet corner and I take my first sip of real Irish Guinness.

“I started areola restorative nipple tattooing and collagen induction therapy back in March 2018,” explains Bren who is based in Galway City, Ireland.

Like so many of us, Bren’s life has been impacted by cancer.

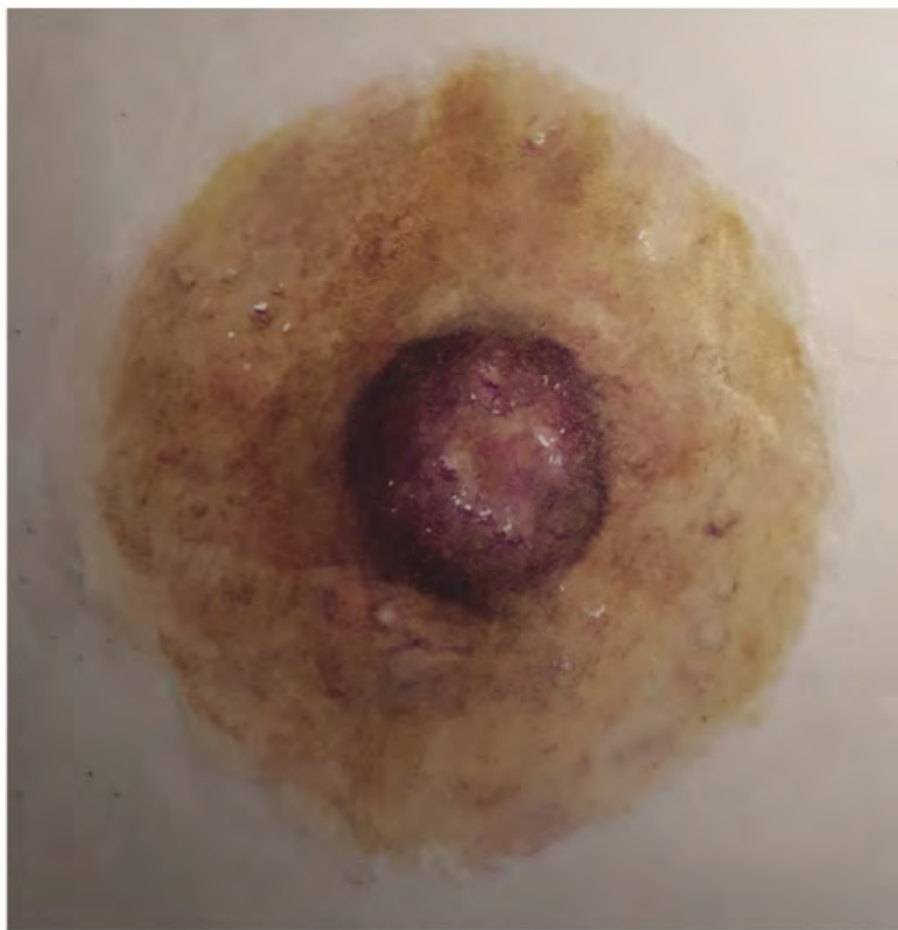
“My own family had been affected by cancer. Commercial tattooing is great, but I felt a deep urge to give something back and make a difference.”

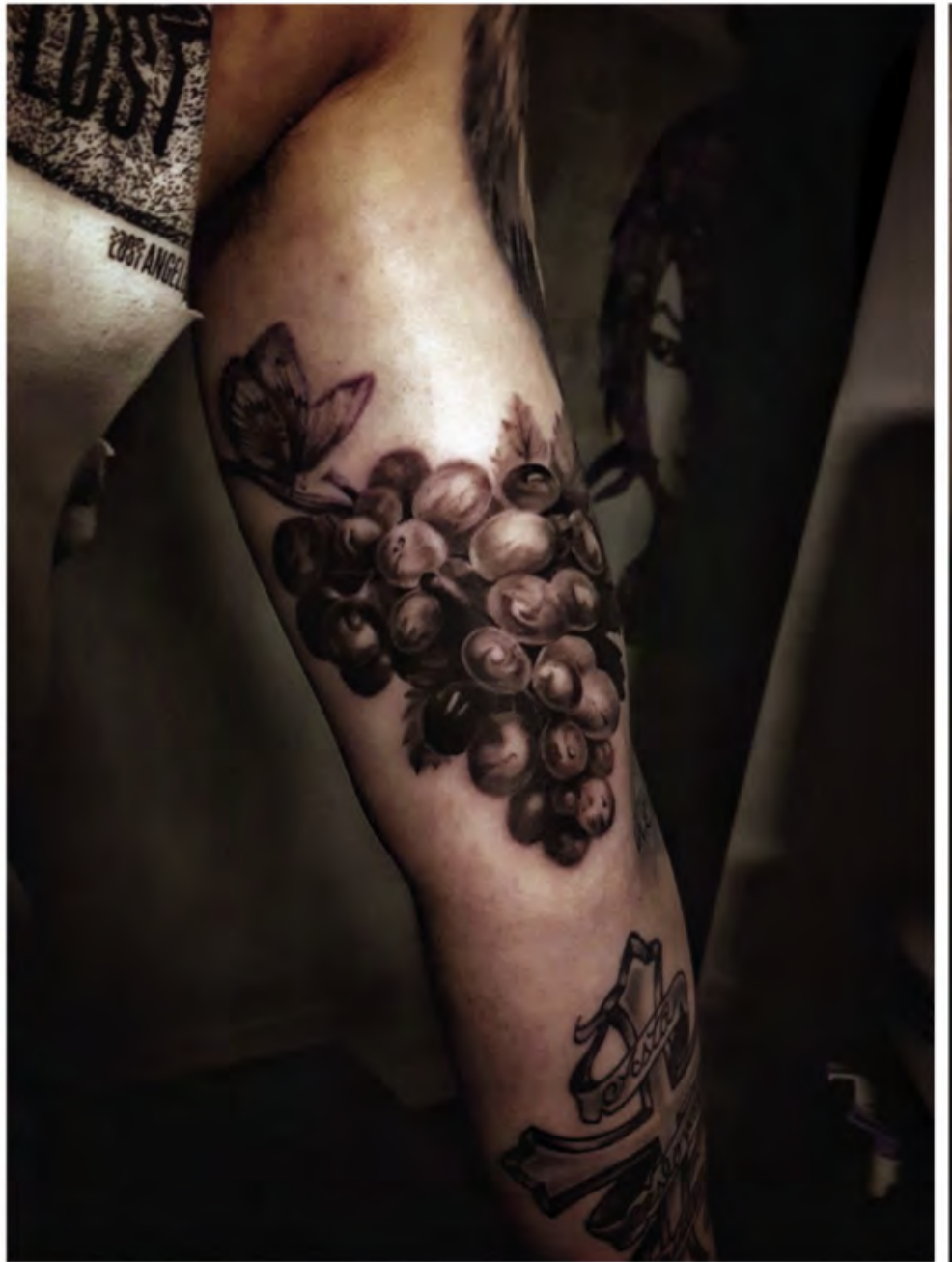
Bren specialises in reconstructive nipple tattooing; a service not offered in the majority of tattoo studios. Despite the difficulty in learning the skills to help cancer survivors Bren was determined to make the transition from commercial tattooist to tattoo therapist.

“A few years ago I wanted to do work with mastectomy tattooing on breast cancer survivors. I did a lot of research but I could not find anyone to train under. I was very conscious that these clients had very different skin compared to a client who had never had breast cancer or undergone radiotherapy, chemotherapy or surgery. After hunting round I managed to get the training I needed and in March 2018 I qualified and received my certification.”

Bren’s qualification stood her alone amongst her peers.

“I was the first person in Ireland to be qualified as an Areola Restorative tattoo artist. I have been tattooing for 9 years and I specialise in realism. I had always a desire to tattoo which I think is common amongst the committed artists; it’s not a job it’s a life. I love tattooing and drawing and it has enabled me to travel extensively being a guest at fantastic studios and cosmopolitan conventions. I’m always looking to improve my art and this is important so I can provide the best service possible to my customers who want restorative nipple tattoos. Last November I was selected out





ONE OF BREN'S CLIENTS, CLAIRE, GIVES HER TESTIMONY ON RESTORATIVE NIPPLE TATTOOS.

"After a mastectomy in 2011 and then reconstruction surgery in 2012 I never had a nipple tattooed on mainly due to the fact that my natural breast has had skin grafts; I didn't see the need for a nipple tattoo. When the opportunity came up to have a tattoo by a specialist I was happy. The experience was incredible, Bren, my artist was fantastic at putting me at ease and I felt totally comfortable in her abilities. She spent a lot of time studying my unusual skin grafts and scarring and the colouring needed to match the tattoo to my other side. I was unsure how I would feel about the finished effect but I was totally amazed at the 3D effect."

"It is so realistic. Since healing, when I catch sight of myself in the mirror at home I can't believe it's just a tattoo. It has actually made a huge difference to my confidence even though only my husband and I see it! I feel more balanced and even and like I'm "whole" once more. I can't thank Bren enough and would highly recommend the specialist tattooist to anyone post surgery."



Help Centre

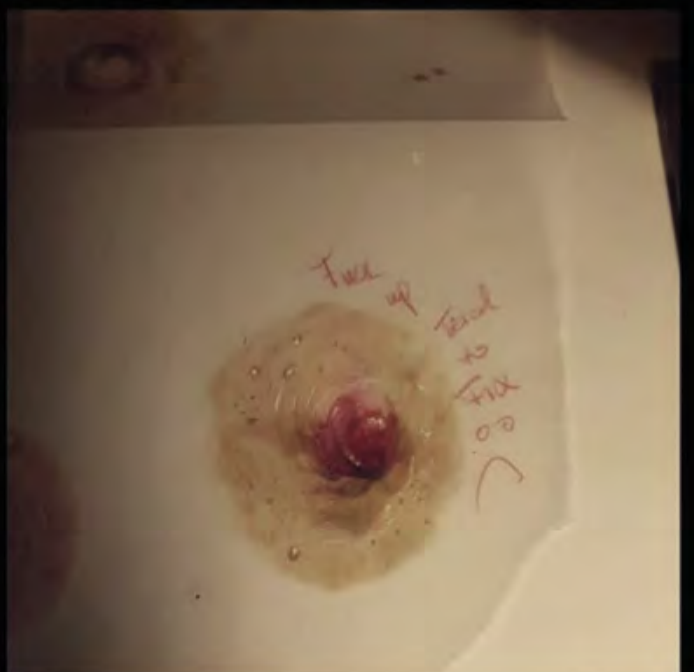
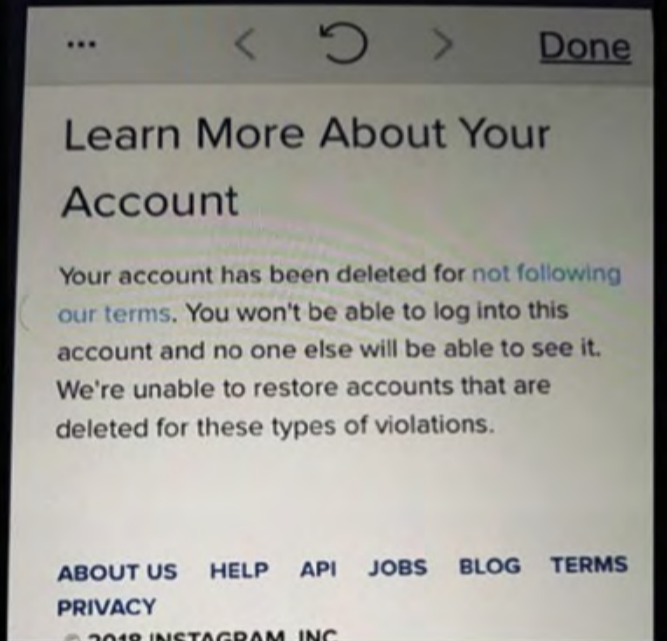
Does Instagram allow post-mastectomy photos?

Yes. We understand that undergoing a mastectomy is a life-changing experience, and that sharing photos can help raise awareness about breast cancer and support the women and men facing a diagnosis, undergoing treatment or living with the scars of cancer. The vast majority of these kinds of photos are following our policies.

Was this information helpful?

Yes No

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of 100's of applicants to attend the Venice Interactive Tattoo Seminar hosted by 4 master tattoo artists. Attending was an amazing experience and I felt honoured to be able to polish my skills. After 9 years I finally feel I'm an advanced tattoo artist who can do justice to those who have experienced the trauma of breast cancer."

While Bren is proud to be using tattooing as a healing tool there has been one huge stumbling block in getting her skills to the people who need them; social media.

"Social media really does get in the way of raising awareness of restorative nipple tattoos; it's quite difficult to promote on Facebook and Instagram. I've been reported and pages shut down because of my work, even though it clearly states on their policies that what I am doing is covered because they state that anything to do with mastectomy is allowed; but I still get flagged. When my case is reviewed they just don't allow it. It's a very difficult battle to fight."

It's a real pity the social media behemoths aren't backing Bren's work as many people are completely unaware of the difference restorative tattooing can make. Instagram, with its image heavy content, is the ideal platform to champion Bren's work but Bren has had multiple problems posting on the site.

"Instagram just shut me down. I couldn't log in, they deleted my page and it took me a week to resolve. Even after I lodged complaints there was no direct communication, no human being I could contact, only a no reply message saying that my page was deleted by mistake. I think they were trying to cover their own backsides to be honest."

It's not just the soulless bots and remote algorithms that have flagged Bren's work; she's faced a backlash from flesh and blood people.

"I have even been reported in a private tattoo artists groups for posting pictures of tattooed nipples. It's just a fake nipple. Even if it was a real nipple it's not it's not sexual content. I can't understand why people are terrified of women's nipples. Why is it ok to see men's nipples on Facebook and Instagram and not women's?"

"These are people who have battled cancer and all the stress that comes with it. The dysphasia they have to contend with can be massive. All we are doing is promoting body positive images; we aren't trying to sex things up, shock people or bring down the pillars of civilisation. I've had clients who are so overjoyed with the results of a nipple tattoo; their joy is testament to the healing power of tattoos. I've seen clients in tears with how grateful they are. They have nothing but appreciation for what me and my fellow nipple restorative tattooists do. I'm so very lucky to do this kind of specialised tattooing; it really puts a fresh perspective on life. I just wish these American social media companies would realise the true therapeutic power of tattooing.

Aside from restorative nipple tattoos Bren tries to use her skills to help others in need.

"I also tattoo over scars and deal with self harm. The tattoo helps to close an old chapter and creates a second change for my clients. As society we can be cruel and judgemental on what we see. I love my work although I wouldn't ever see it as work. I wake up everyday looking forward to meeting my clients and creating unique pieces. Once per month I offer free areola restorative work either single or bilateral areola. This is my way of giving back to these survivors."

I smile and offer to buy Bren a drink. It's the least I can do, on behalf of the tattoo community, to say thank you for all her hard work. ▣

BACK IN THE SADDLE

Revolver Tattoo Rooms

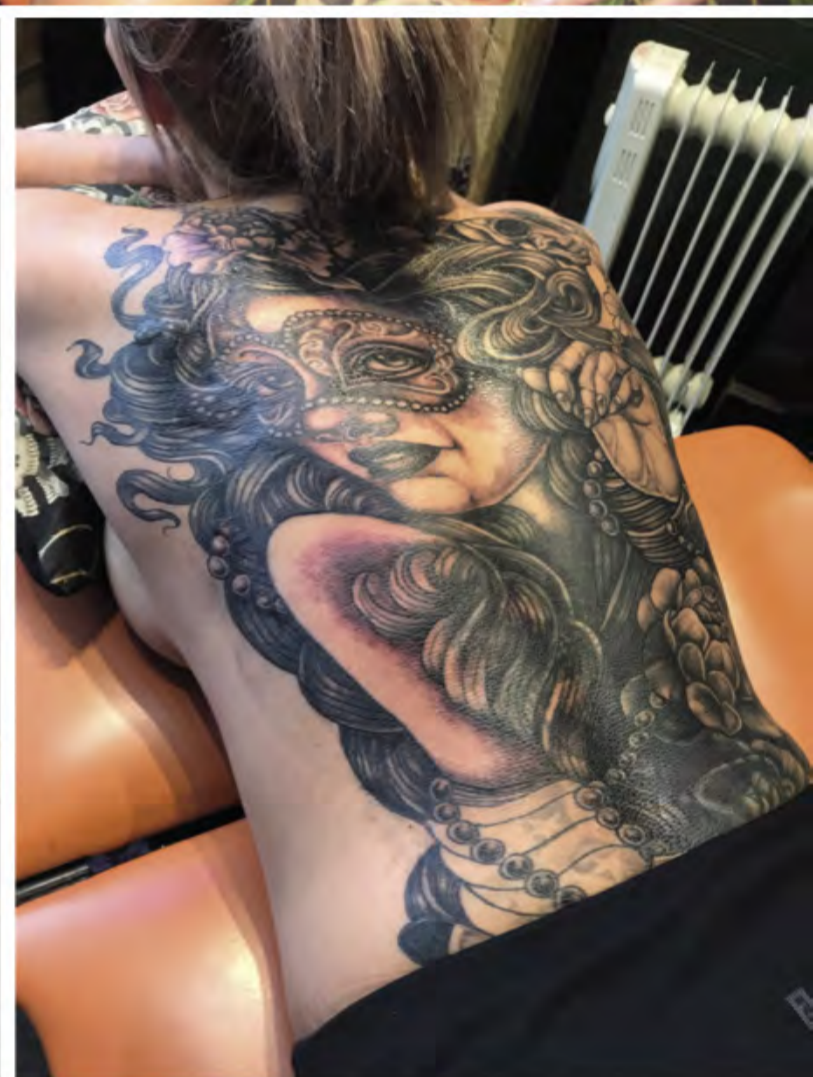
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f daveperrytattoo

Sometime last summer, I bumped into my old buddy Dave Perry who—and he won't disagree with this—likes to 'blow stuff up' from time to time with his tattooing. Being as he's been far more than a cog in the wheels around these parts for many years, I asked him if he'd like to contribute to issue 300 somehow. "What have you got in mind?" he asks. Which is a dumb thing to ask somebody like me but I told him anyway and then took myself off to Starbucks like some thirsty agent of SPECTRE while Dave tried to figure out just how much he could prove me wrong...

Models: Nicola Norwood, Emma-Marie Whittenham, Annie Langford, Nina Chadwick
Photographer: Dominick Mortier [Dark Moon Media, IG: @Dark_moon_media]
Assistant: Lauriance Gerthoffer-Ham
Make-Up: Kira Bush







NICOLA NORWOOD SAYS...

"I've always been obsessed with the idea of a whole back piece and when Dave approached me about wearing his art on myself - how could I refuse? With Dave's excellent reputation I wanted in!

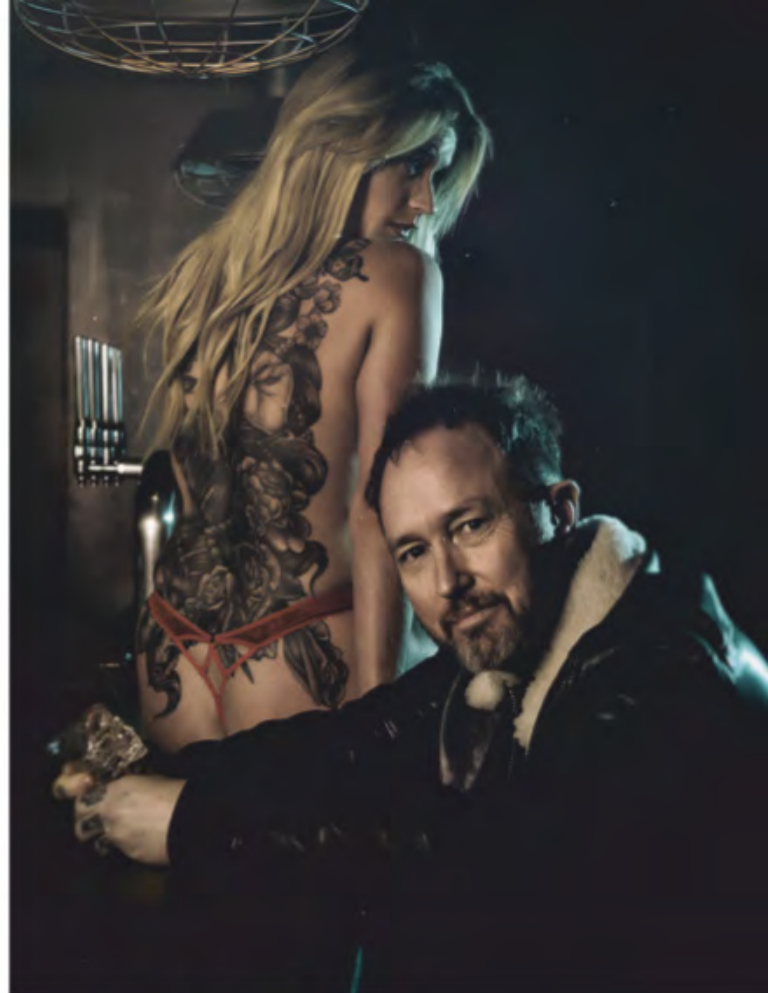
I can't deny the experience was intense at times, during the 21 hours under the needle but to be honest I'm sad now that it's over.

The final shoot for Skin Deep was so amazing. Considering I was strutting around a club half naked with two other girls it is definitely an experience I will never forget."

If you've been around these parts for a while, you'll know that Dave Perry was once the Editor of Tattoo Master—which by default makes him my go-to guy when something gets too complicated in the tech department for my artistic head to deal with. Given that he lives on the other side of the country from me, I also figured that was a safe enough distance to watch a friendly challenge progress, because when you mention in passing that you've 'recently got into doing large scale black and grey', these are the kind of things that happen. What's a little gauntlet on the floor between friends anyway?

It wasn't even a challenge really... I knew he'd come up with something superb—I just wanted to see exactly what he would come up with because sometimes, there's nothing more fun than poking the hornet's nest just because it's there. The best way forward from here though is to hand the keys over to the man and let him explain himself...

"In the words of Justin Timberlake, 'I'm bringing sexy back.' Nothing quite catches the eye like a large scale back tattoo on a beautiful woman. For me, back-pieces like this are one of the greatest gifts that the tattooing gods could ever be-



stow on an artist. A wonderfully big and reasonably flat canvas, and the licence to do what you please with it, knowing full well that when it's finished it is sure to draw attention and reaction wherever it is seen. What more could you ask for?

“With this in mind, dark, high contrast backpieces have become something of a passion for me, and when I spoke with the Sion last year about putting something special together for the 300th edition of the magazine, we decided it would be quite something if I could complete three full back tattoos on three different models, in time for its publication. One for every one hundred issues produced since Skin Deep's inception all those years ago.

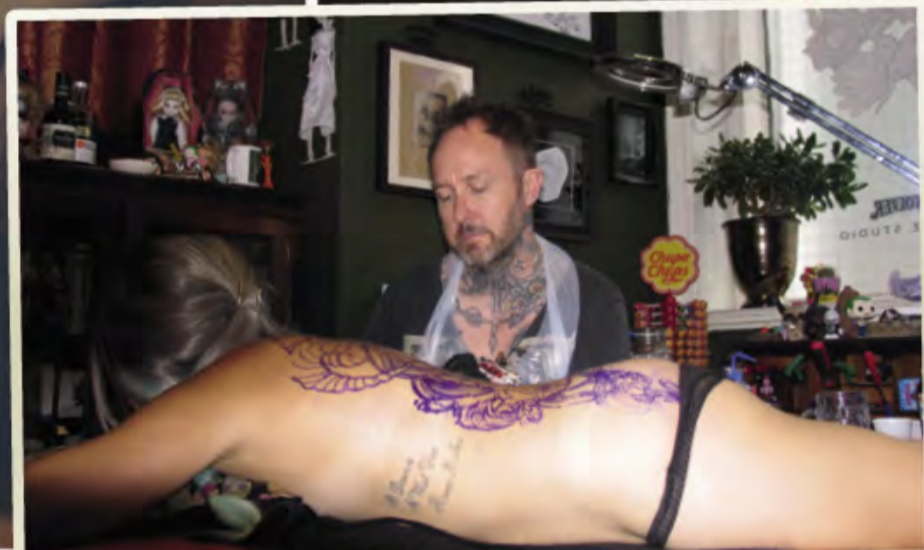
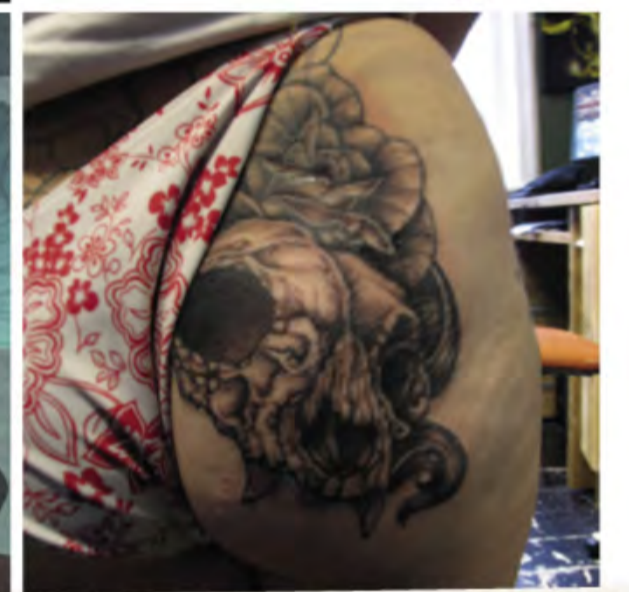
“It all sounded straightforward enough really, but we didn't decide on the feature until late July, which pretty much left me with just over five months in which to find three willing participants, create three original full back designs, complete the work—making sure to schedule in recovery time between sessions—and have all three tattoos healed and ready for final photography before the January deadline date... while also running a busy studio and keeping my regular customers happy of course. Oh, and we also had the Christmas pe-

riod to deal with. But, the fact that it seemed tough, to be completely honest, just made it all the more exciting.

“And so, to the drawing board... work to do.

“I had decided to create three sexy, gothic female images, all of which would cover from shoulder to bum, be tattooed completely in black and grey, and work well together later in a final photoshoot for the magazine. For my three models I first chose two girls who had 'blank canvas' backs. Annie, a local girl with very few tattoos who was keen to increase her coverage, and Emma, who both lived





and worked in London but was more than happy to make regular trips down to be part of the project. Both girls were happy to give me free rein.

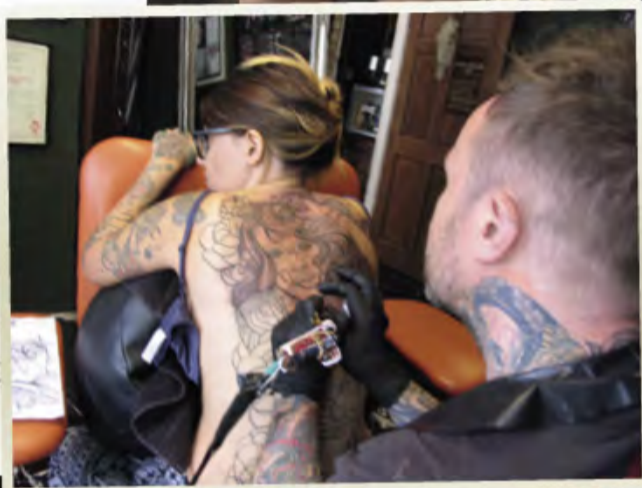
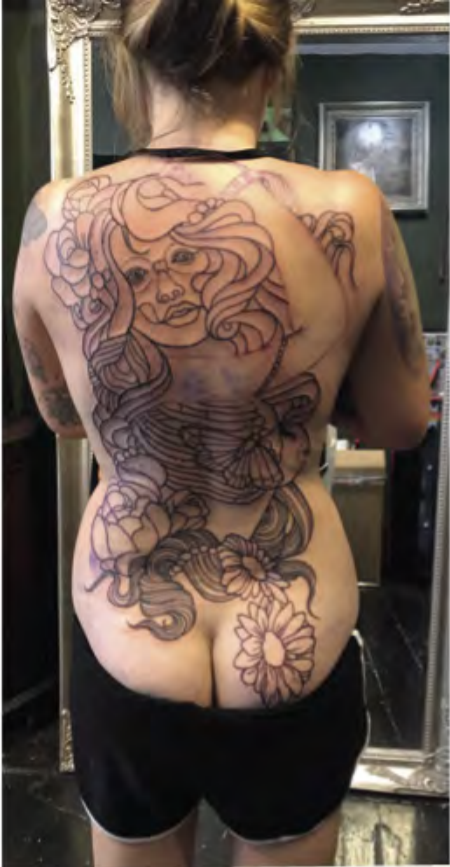
“For Annie I would draw a sexy witch design, inspired in pose by The Enchantress from Marvel’s Suicide Squad, while for Emma I produced two different drawings. One a more traditional Day of the Dead type design, the other a girl in the same pose, but this time with her ribs exposed and looking far more gnarly. I was delighted when she chose the latter.

“My third model however, was going to be a little more challenging as Nicola already had a medium sized, fairly dark tattoo in the middle of her lower back, so her design would involve something of a cover-up as well. Not ideal when tattooing designs that are going to be seen the world over, but as I said earlier, I do love a challenge and I decided this would also show what was possible through placement and careful planning. Risky, but worth it, if I could pull it off.

“For anyone interested in the more technical aspects of the project, my weapons of choice for these tattoos would be my favourite anglo American

ANNIE LANGFORD SAYS...

“I decided to take part in this feature because I thought it would be a terrific opportunity for me to be worked on by someone like Dave Perry. The whole experience was amazing, from the design process, to having the needle against my skin and seeing this fantastic work take shape. Dave was so professional and made me feel so comfortable, even during the hard sessions! Always a good old chat too and I think Dave managed to hear every noise I could possibly make during a tattoo session, which at times was hilarious for us both, Now I can’t wait to get back into the bikini and show off the art work that I have! Absolutely love it!”



EMMA-MARIE WHITTENHAM SAYS...

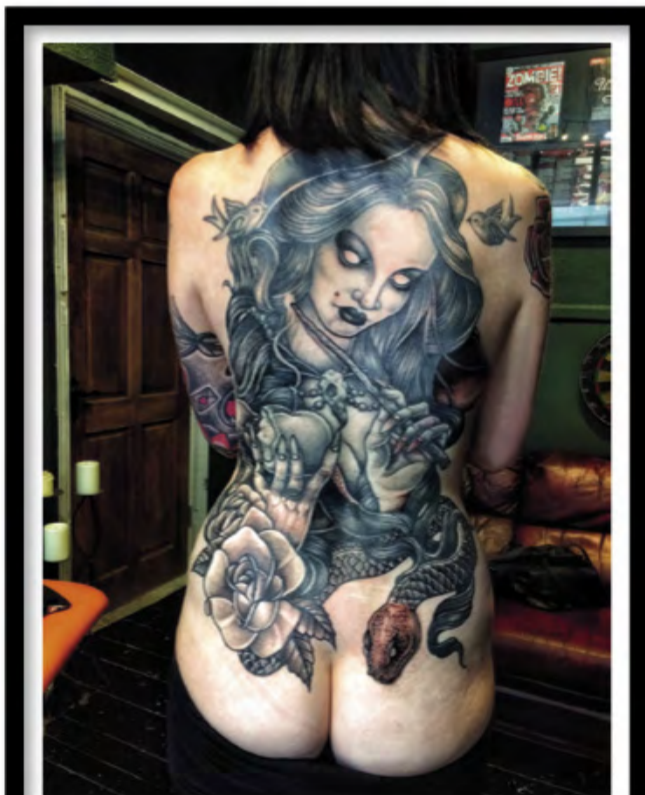
"I took part in the project because I'd be thinking about getting a back piece for a little while. It was easily the best but most painful decision I have ever made, but worth every second. My favourite memories were fainting [didn't think that would ever happen] and singing through the pain/ticklish bits!"

combo of Mikes. US machine builder Mike Young's liners and UK builder Mike 13's shaders, and the final designs would be mocked up for stencilling using Procreate on my iPad, although at design stage I still prefer to go old school with a pad and pencil. I find I still have way more creative freedom that way.

"We got underway with Annie first at my private studio on the 1st August. Each tattoo would eventually take somewhere between five and six full day sessions, spread three to four weeks apart to allow sensible healing times and would require some serious steel and dedication from all of the skin donors. Emma for example often travelled down overnight on the coach, only to then sit for a whole day's worth of pain having had absolutely no sleep at all. Plenty of coffee, a little bit of Ametop, and lots of laughs and banter, slowly but surely, the back pieces started to come together

"However, large back tattoos are not for the faint of heart, and the amount of tattooing in concentrated bursts eventually took its toll on Annie. Having been our first model, she had to eventually tap out of the project in December. She had been struggling with the intensity of the sessions and was finding it





HERE'S ONE I PREPARED EARLIER...

After suffering the small setback of Annie having to drop out mid way through the project, I was lucky enough to be able to call on Nina Chadwick. A local hair stylist and a regular customer at the studio over the years, I had finished her back-piece months earlier and had also tattooed her chest and throat, so there was no question that she would fit in perfectly with the other girls for our final photoshoot and take the pressure off Annie who by now was feeling pretty bad about letting everyone down.

difficult to commit for more than three or four hours at a time, which meant that we clearly were not going to be able to hit the deadline we had set to make the issue. This could have been a catastrophe for our project, but luckily, in true Blue Peter style, I had 'one I had prepared earlier'. Nina, a regular customer of mine, had only just completed her own back tattoo, in exactly the same style as the others, and so we were able to slot her effortlessly into the project in place of Annie and eventually the three girl photoshoot, as per our original concept was complete. We were saved!

"As I look at all the pictures spread across these pages, I can't help but smile at the 'moments' I shared with all of these wonderful people in the many long tattoo sessions we enjoyed together during the creation of these backpieces. I am eternally grateful to everyone who took part, and of course to Skin Deep magazine for inviting me to show off a little and be a part of this landmark issue of the magazine. Tattoos really are little moments in time saved forever, and it is always an honour when someone invites you to leave a piece of your artwork with them forever, both on these pages and on their skin.

"I love my job." ▣

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A dense, circular tattoo of a forearm, resembling a large letter 'A'. The tattoo is composed of a complex grid of small, intricate characters and symbols. The characters include various alphanumeric combinations, some of which are recognizable words or names, such as "S2r", "X77i", "Y77i", and "L77i". The overall pattern is highly detailed and fills the entire area of the forearm, with some characters appearing larger or more prominent than others. The tattoo is inked in a dark, rich color, likely black or a very dark grey, and stands out sharply against the light skin of the forearm.

TYPE FACES

Curiosity can take us to interesting places. For Cypriot tattooist Andreas Vrontis, the realms reached through his own experimentation changed the focus of his work forever

Some tattoos pretty much just do what they say on the tin. They incorporate limited volumes of imagery or utilise a specific style or method. That's cool. But, I'm increasingly intrigued by the creations that endeavour to the the opposite, the tattoos that are like trifles, crammed with complimentary layers that only reveal themselves upon deeper inspection.

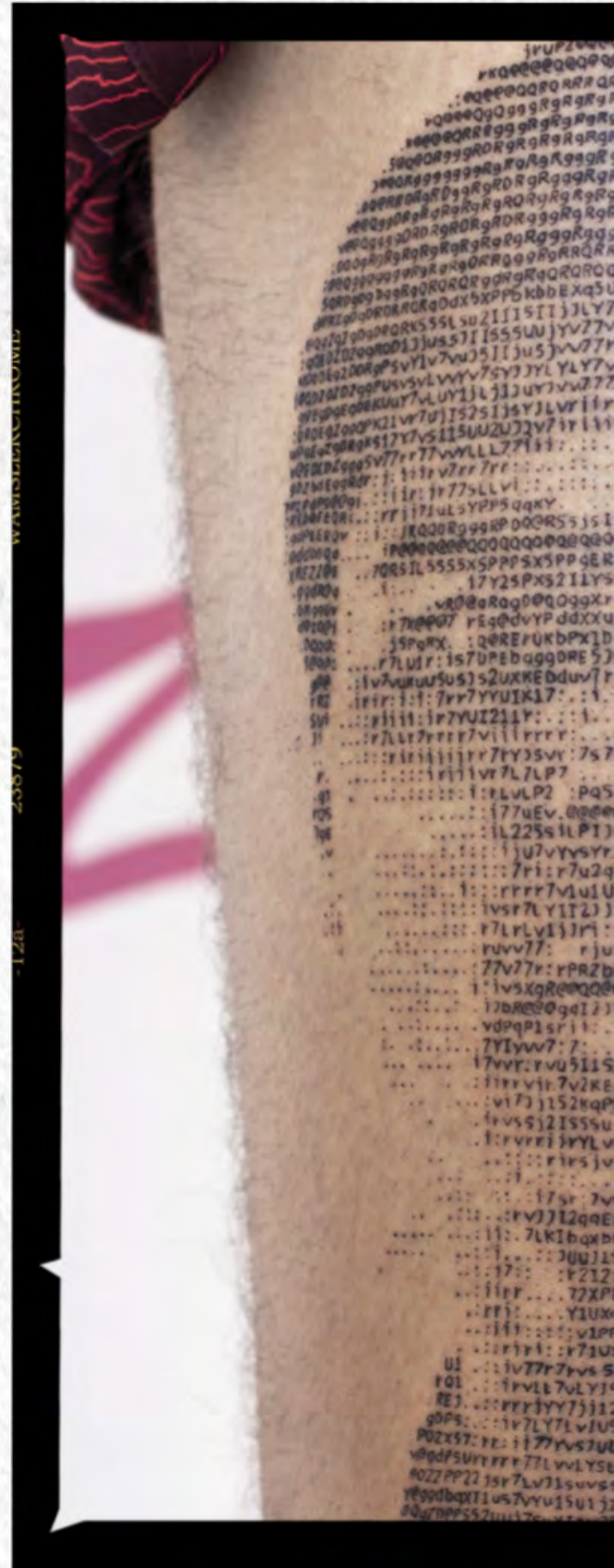
At first glance, it's clear that the portraits of Andreas Vrontis appear to be doing something a little different. A faint recognisable portrait or shape is hinted at but if you look a little closer you will discover that the tattoo is in fact a complex pattern, carefully created using thousands of symbols, letters and numbers. These are complicated tattoos, and famous ones too. After being featured in vari-



ous art exhibitions, magazines and documentaries, Andreas' elaborate pieces have gone on to win awards all over the world. But where did it all begin?

In 2015, Andreas set himself the task of playing around with lettering. He wondered how a simple form could come together successfully to become something much more: "I have always been fascinated with how a simple pattern could create detail in

an end result". Inspired by achieving detail, repetition and symmetry, he developed a process, tried it out, and his new digital-style portraits were born. Not allowing himself to be held-back by the constraints of time was a very important part of Andreas allowing the style to emerge in all its greatness: "I like to have an open mind and try everything out, no matter the level of difficulty or

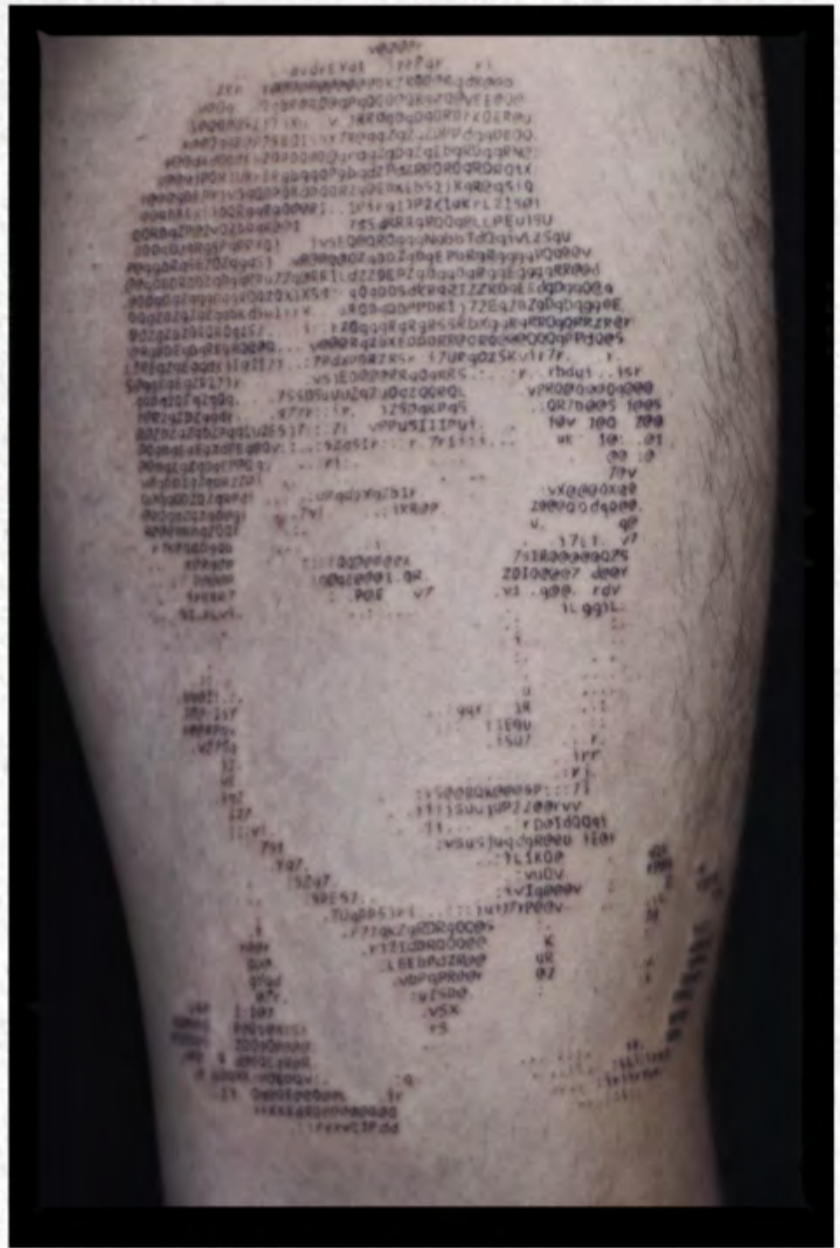


how long it will take.”
After taking years to develop, Andreas is reluctant to share the finite details of his homegrown tattoo process, but stresses the importance of losing himself in the image as an important initial step. “The first thing I do is take the actual picture and look at it for a really long time in order to understand it. Then I try to unfold the layers, for example, separate the shadows. What follows is a long

process of trial and error using letters, numbers and punctuation marks.” Utilising many different digital programmes like Photoshop, the entire journey used to take days but having mastered his own practice, Andreas can now create a design for a client in just a few hours. As expected, the intricate pieces leave zero margin for error when the time comes to imprint them on human skin: “the lines are very thin and the letter places so close to one another—there is no way to cover anything up, it will all show in the end result,” explains Andreas. The entire tattoo process isn’t free from exhaustion either and larger portraits can take up to 8 hours to complete: “I need to stay focused and end the work with the same flow in which I started it in. It’s a long process but I enjoy it.”

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED WITH HOW A SIMPLE PATTERN COULD CREATE DETAIL IN AN END RESULT





THE LINES ARE VERY THIN AND THE LETTER PLACES SO CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER – THERE IS NO WAY TO COVER ANYTHING UP, IT WILL ALL SHOW IN THE END RESULT

Despite its international critical-acclaim, this bespoke way of creating art doesn't mean more to the artist than other less 'unusual' ways of tattooing and he often tries to incorporate more traditional methods into his digital pieces to form a hybrid of different styles. He also has collaboration with another artist as one of his biggest ambitions for the future. Whether a tattoo is made up of symbols or is a more seemingly simplistic line-work crea-

tion, it is "the amount of detail" that excites Andreas more so than the final design itself and how it would be categorised. For him, irregardless of the final specifics, detail is the single best way an artist can grow and develop: "the more detail in the design, the more struggle, but also... the more satisfaction."

Andreas frequently travels and tattoos at events and studios all over the world. Otherwise, you'll find him at his studio Vrontis Tattoo Shop, Limassol, Cyprus (vrontistattoo.com)

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INTO THE NOW

In the second of my "Issue 300 catch-up articles with old friends", Rakhee Shah is the only one who has tattooed me. Over the last few years, she has changed her outlook somewhat on what she is doing within the world of tattooing and also in her own head, most recently working up this series of custom zodiac designs that I thought I'd dig about in...

Back when we first got to know each other, Rakhee was one of the very few artists I knew who had a right to say she tattooed realism with any authenticity. There were many others around but it always seemed to be marred somehow—as I am fond of saying ‘that monkey looks like it got clipped by a bus’. You know the drill. Not so with Rakhee. Far from it. There came a time however, when the realism train picked up speed and out in the world, less monkeys were getting hit by buses. Rakhee, in her own inimitable way, got off that train and went in search of another way. So the question is, what changed?

“Realism is, and will always be, a passion of mine. I think as an artist, it’s natural to always revert to what attracted us to being an artist from the start.

“As a child and young person I was always attracted to faces and portraiture and I explored it in every medium I could from Rembrandt’s portraits to Picasso’s cubists women, but always a fascination with faces. I am one of those from a now dying generation of tattoo artists that had to really start from the basics, explore and confi-

dently pass off all types of styles. Back then in order to make money and grow, you needed to offer people whatever they wanted, which forced your technique to explore every genre of tattooing styles.

“I inevitably started focusing on black and grey realism and taught myself as much as I could about techniques—absorbed as much advice as I could. I quite happily carried on growing and working in realism for a number of years and was getting some serious recognition for my work but I started to feel I was reaching a brick wall.

“I was very confident in my work and how things were going but something wasn’t feeling right or good about my work. I wasn’t getting the same satisfaction or fulfillment from it that I had when I started and I couldn’t put my finger on it.

“Fast forward and a few years back and I had my gorgeous son. It was the first time in 15 years I had taken any time off and even though I didn’t realise it at the time, the distance from work and the guilt of having to return to work while he was still very young, made me do some serious thinking about my career.



I PROMISED MYSELF THAT IF I WAS TO CARRY ON AT WORK AND DEALING WITH THE PITFALLS OF BEING A WORKING MUM I REALLY HAD TO LOVE WHAT I WAS DOING

“I started noticing artwork from some incredible abstract artist coming from Eastern Europe and looking at their work gave me such a wonderful feeling of inspiration and excitement that I felt I had lost a long time before and it really inspired me to into putting some other plans in motion.

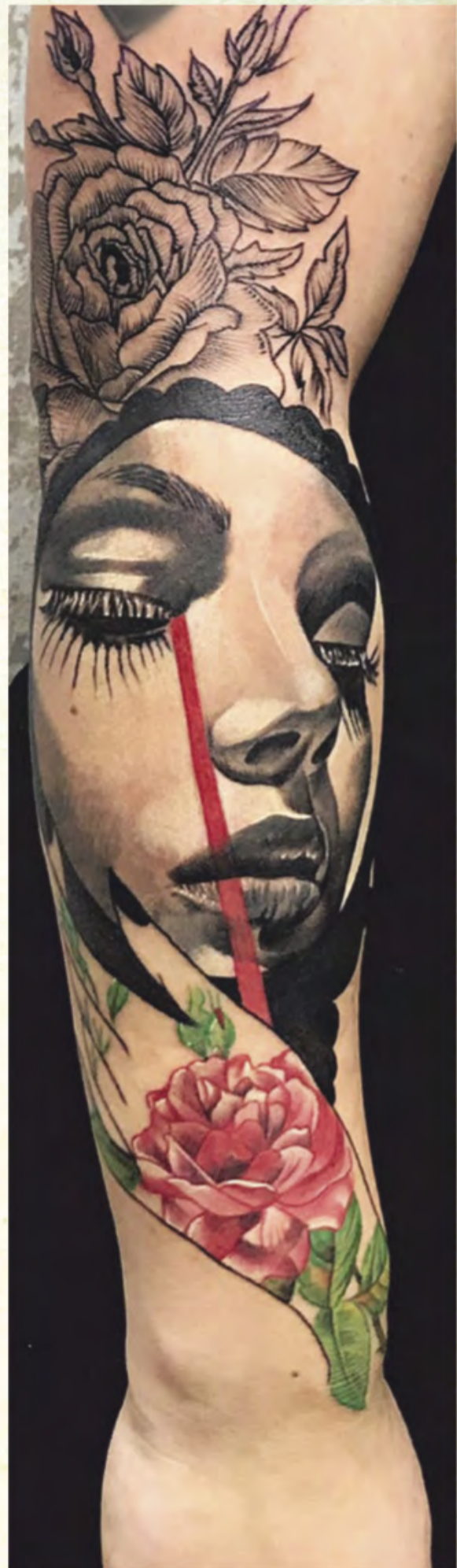
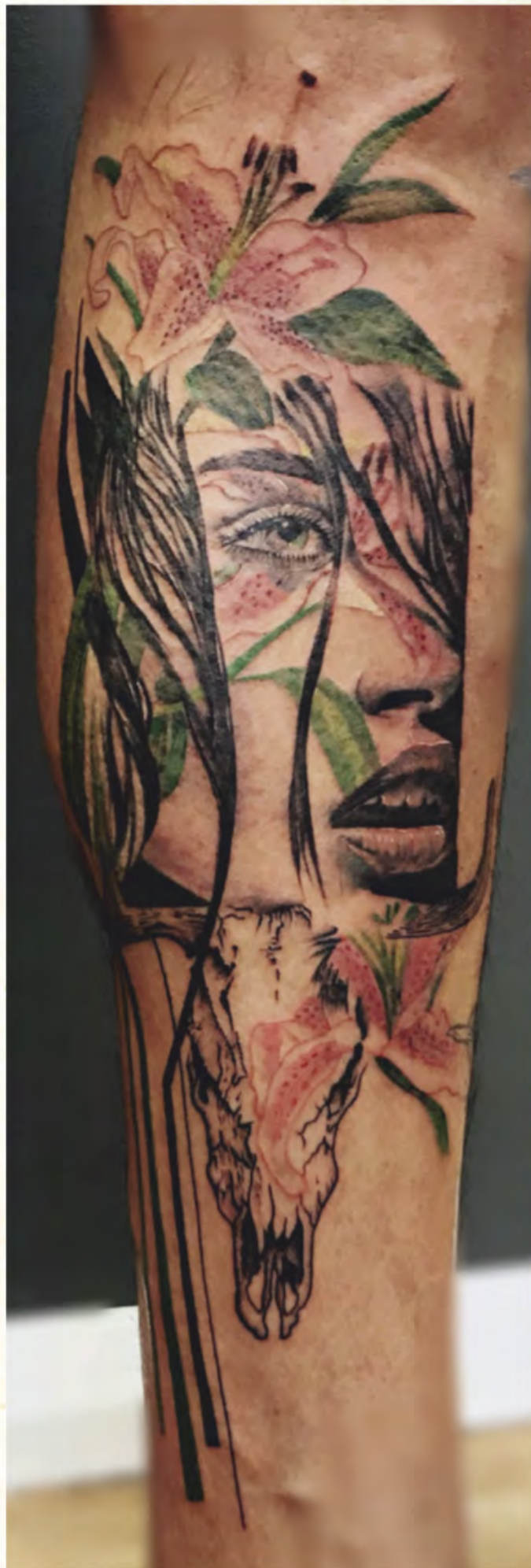
“I dug out my old art portfolio and started looking through the work I had produced at university: political satire, life drawings, and specifically, screen printings. I started feeling much clearer and focused about how and where I wanted to start taking my work while still very much keeping my love for faces/portraiture and everything I had learnt from my career that far.

“Returning to work was a completely different experience after that. Mummy guilts are very real and the first few years of my sons life were really testing on my career and creativity. I promised myself that if I was to carry on at work and dealing with the pitfalls of being a working mum I really had to love what I was doing. To create art

and tattoos that don't just satisfy my client but something I feel incredibly proud and happy to do. As much as I loved doing realism, the inevitable lack of creativity that comes with tattooing realism was something I was truly missing.”

All of which brings us nicely into the now. Rakhee's take on the zodiac suite isn't her sole art project over recent years by any means, but it sure as hell is one that caught my eye. Considering the zodiac is such a well known and malleable topic, I was surprised I hadn't seen more riffs on the theme given that it seems such an obvious target for tattooing when you consider it.

“When I started confidently offering my new style and designs to people around a year ago, I needed a project that would kick-start people into looking and being interested in the work I wanted to do. I was brainstorming one day



and had a Eureka moment about star signs and the zodiac. Not only is there a mountain of text that relates to astrology and its individual characteristics but there is so much beautiful imagery that goes with it... all of which are unique to any given sign. It's such a great subject for artistic interpretation and it directly relates to the ego and narcissist in all of us. As soon as the idea came to me, it felt right considering what I was hoping to achieve with it and honestly couldn't have expected the how well it was received." **Is there any leeway for client input here or was it 'you get what you see'... or perhaps a mix? I guess nothing is written in stone with custom tattooing?** "None of my designs were ever intended to be adapted. I was very meticulous about subject, colours, composition and over all, mood. I researched heavily into each charac-

teristic and any client-side changes would have thrown the whole piece off. Saying that, the clients all understood this and actually wanted no input in the designs. The whole concept of the idea really was for it to act as a catalyst for my new style so it was crucial the tattoos were done the way I intended them." **... and the obvious question—these final two designs (shown here) that don't appear as tattoos yet, they're still available if anybody is interested right?** "Very much so, Scorpio and Virgo are still available but if any interested readers doesn't get to catch me in time before they do get completed, I'm more than happy to do alternatives which has been the case with a lot of the signs." **Is this how you like to work most these days... taking your time to work on the designs and seeing who**



AS MUCH AS I LOVED DOING REALISM, THE INEVITABLE LACK OF CREATIVITY THAT COMES WITH TATTOOING REALISM WAS SOMETHING I WAS TRULY MISSING

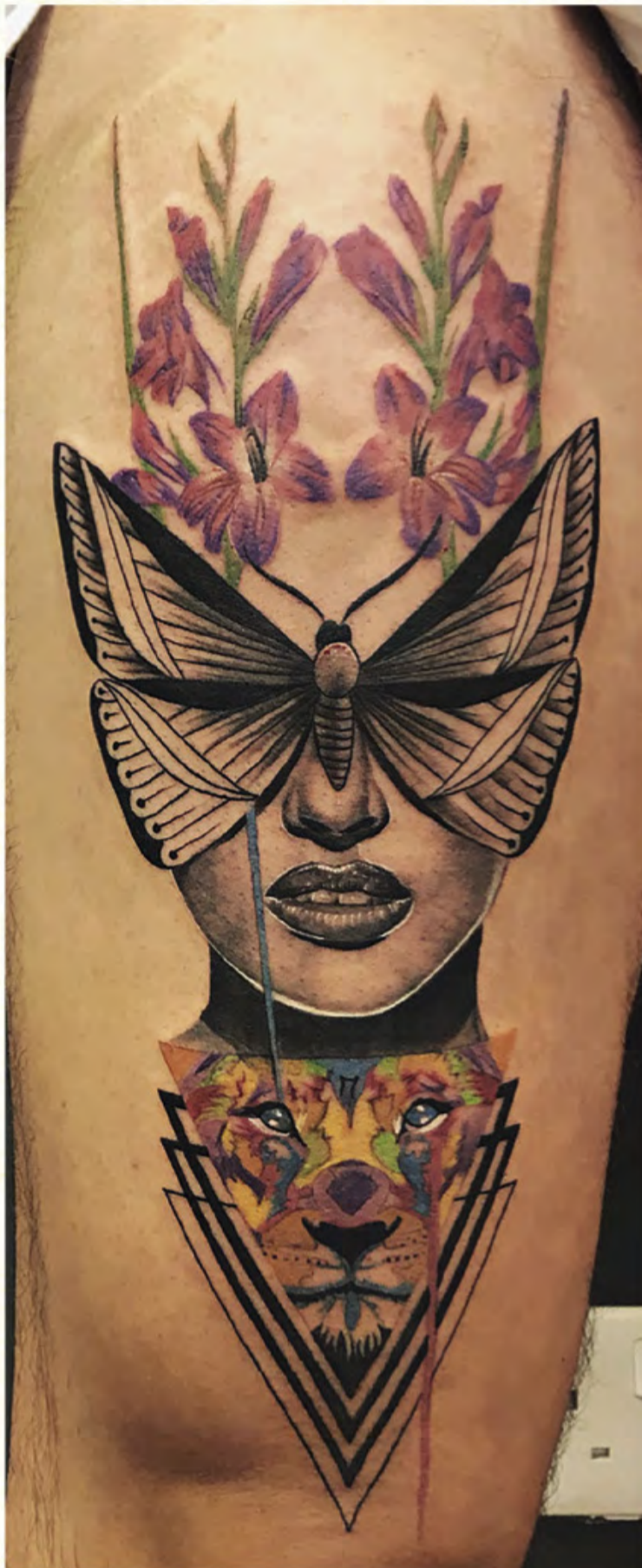
bites? I guess instagram really works for you (or any artist come to that) in respect of launching an idea into the world and getting instant karmic feedback on it.

“Quite honestly I despise social media for many reasons, it’s dangerous and misleading at the best of times. I am a very private person and I have major concerns about how social media affects the psychology of people and especially our children. As I became a mum, I am even more conscious of this.

“I think Black Mirror can explain my concerns a lot better than I can vocalise—and that subject is a whole article in itself. Saying that, I use social media as a tool that is more important now than it ever was before and any self employed business person would be stupid to ignore it. However, for self promotion—especially as a visual artist—Instagram has proven to be a gift in many ways to a lot of artists including myself. It’s just important to remember that it is a tool and a business and there will be inevitable pitfalls with that.

“But, if my designs and tattoos can be viewed by thousands of people around the world in a very short space of time, it can open up many more doors than I had hoped for.

“To answer the first part of that question, I



probably spend around half my time with pre-designed work and half with custom pieces.”

One of the things I’ve always admired about Rakhee is the way she pushes herself... from books she has fenced in my direction that have been worth a damn, right across to the guest spots she chooses. Nothing is ever ‘just because everybody else is doing it’ and that’s exactly how it should be out there.

“Ha! I appreciate that you appreciate that about me!

“You know, I come from a working class immigrant family whose main purpose I suppose, was to survive and put food on the table. I genuinely love life, all of its possibilities and the wonders it can offer and as a child I promised myself I would take advantage of all of that: do something I really love and travel my arse off until I couldn’t do it anymore.

“I can honestly say I’m very much fulfilling that little kids voice that still lives in my head. I’m very much an ‘if I don’t do it, I’ll regret it’ type of person and am very conscious that time is ticking away for all of us.

“Self-improvement is crucial with any creative profession. I





recently attended a seminar by an amazing realism artist—Thomas Carli Jarlier—and treated it as if I was apprentice, learning and absorbing as much as I could. Considering the start I had in life, I’m incredibly proud to say I’m a very happy person and surely in the end, that’s what all of us want right?

“I managed to get away a fair bit last year as it was the first time I could comfortably get back on the traveling horse after my son was born. I do try to guest in places that inspire me or more importantly, that I’ve not been to before. I’ve been sticking to Europe for now as I still don’t like to be too far from my son, so I managed to do Stockholm, Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Dresden last year with an upcoming stint in Austria.

“I love the European tattoo scene right now as my clients all over the continent seem very excited about my work. Hopefully as my son gets older, I can start ventur-

AS A CHILD I PROMISED MYSELF I WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL OF THAT: DO SOMETHING I REALLY LOVE AND TRAVEL MY ARSE OFF UNTIL I COULDN'T DO IT ANYMORE

ing further and better still, bringing him along!”

Being as this is issue 300 and we have known each other since at least issue 200—which was the summer of 2011—a lot has certainly changed for me in 100 issues, so I guess it has for you too. Is there anything you can put your finger on as a stand out change around these parts?

“That’s a scary set of numbers!

“So much has changed and I don’t think I’d recognise myself from back then. My studio has grown from



SO MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE 2001 – I DON'T THINK I'D RECOGNISE MYSELF FROM BACK THEN

strength to strength and I have a good strong crew currently. I have also seen a huge change in staff and the way the newer generation treat jobs these days. Especially in London, job loyalty is pretty non-existent nowadays and as a business owner you have to be ready and prepared for that. Long gone are the days where individuals would stay in a job for a number of years and grow with the business. Now, it's a case of people constantly searching for 'better' and are very focused on individual growth which is just a reflection of the psychology of that generation I guess. "It's not necessarily a good or a bad thing, it's just different to how things were. For example, in the last five years I have seen ten staff come and go whereas the previous five years, only one. The important thing is to pay attention and prepare for it. I guess everyone wants to be the star of their own movie.

"A lot has changed in tattooing too, a lot of it is very much for the better and some for the worse. Every profession has to evolve though and we live in a world



where everyone wants to be famous and that has its own set of consequences for people. We also happen to be in a profession where some artists have an almost 'superstar' status and people's general perspective on the profession has gone completely off kilter. The fact that we work and produce art that is going on a person's body—which they are spending their hard earned money on—seems to be forgotten.

"Aspiring artists appear to be more focused on followers and how their Instagram page looks than getting satisfaction out of a happy client. I try not to spend too much time concerning myself with these things, nor do I in any way, look down or frown upon them.

"Sticking a pitch fork up at the new generation is not my thing—nor do I find it in any way productive.

"I am proud that my studio has stood the test of time and I'm sure it will change and grow in the years to come too." **Well said, my wonderful friend... we probably shouldn't leave it so long to clash heads in future... ▣**



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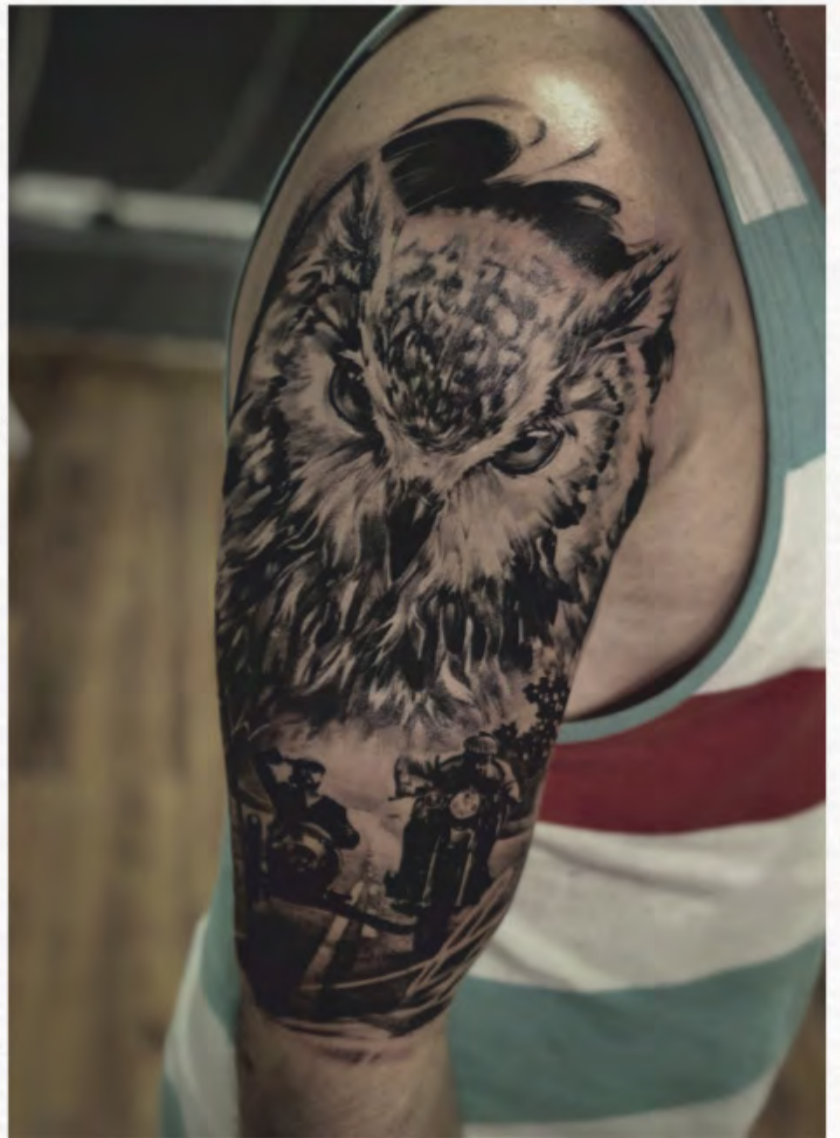
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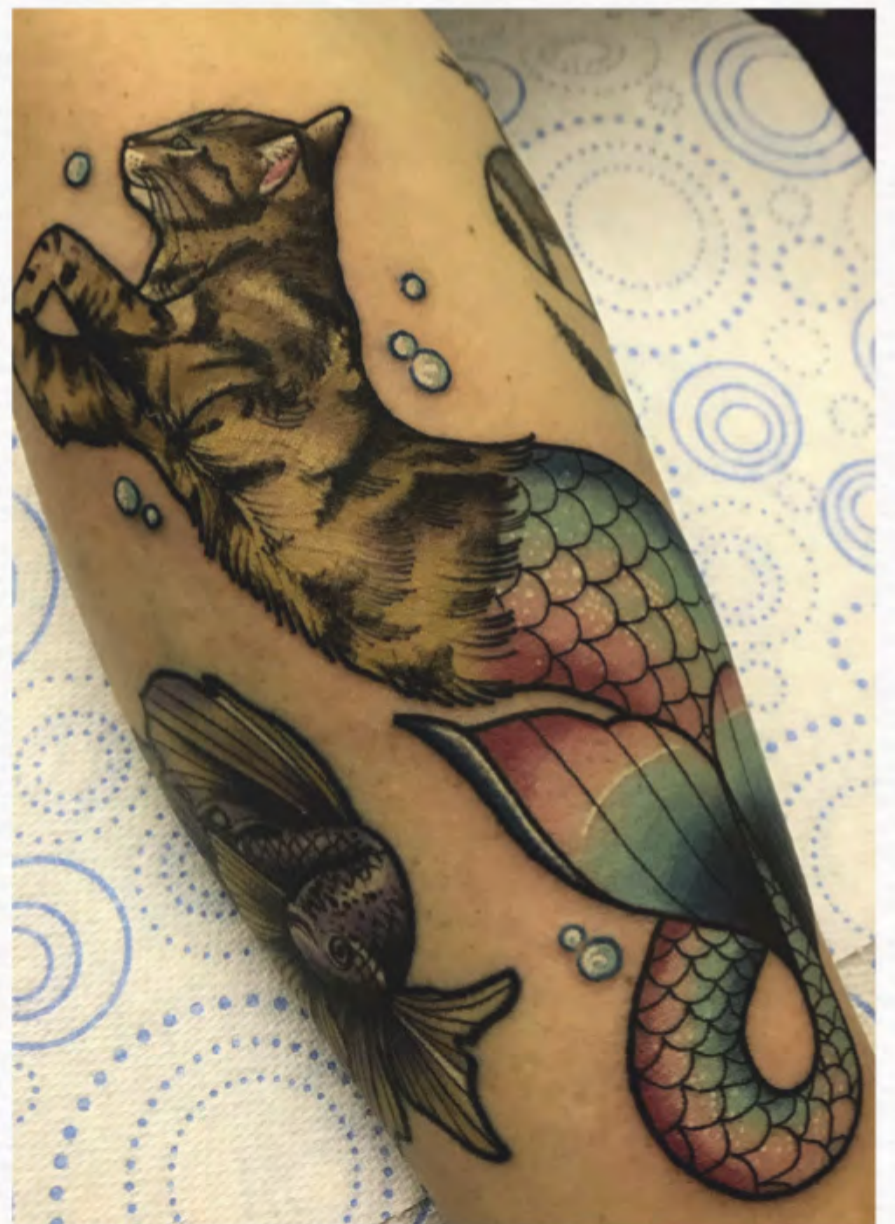
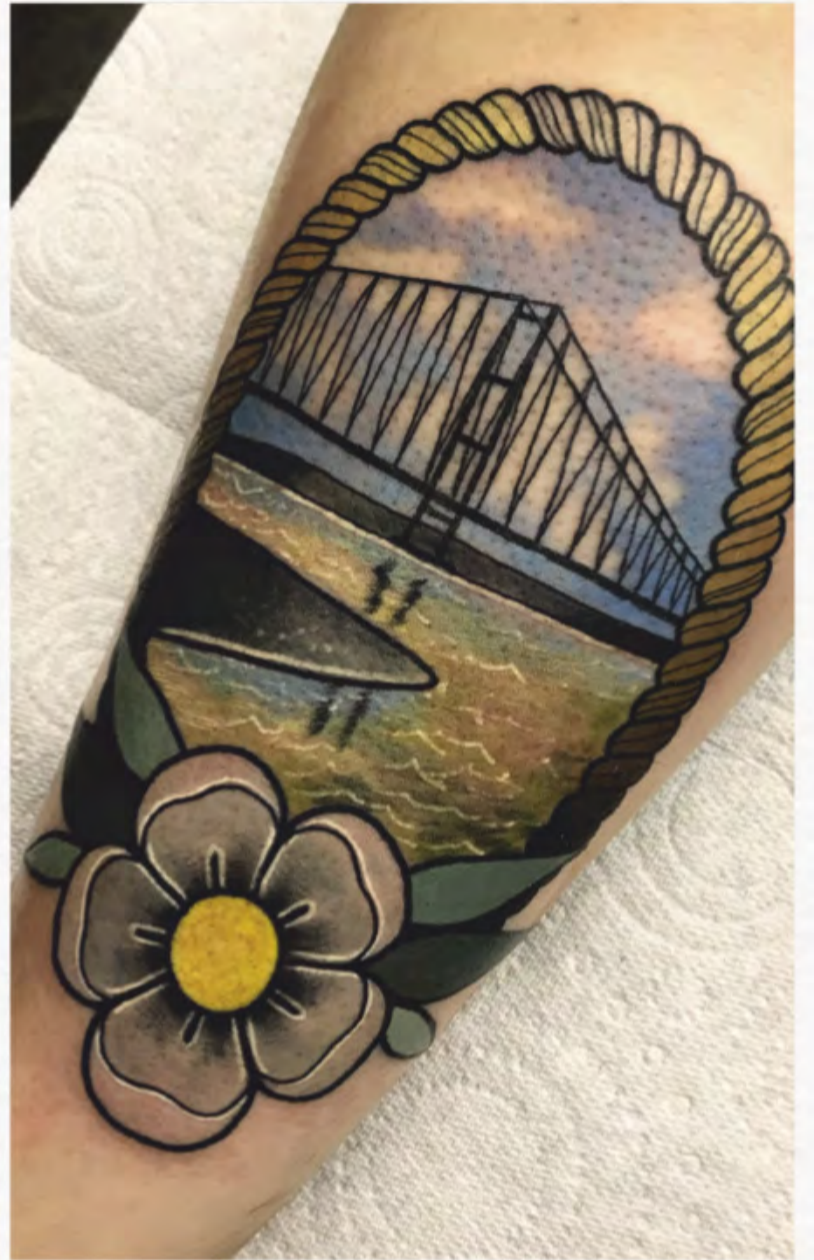


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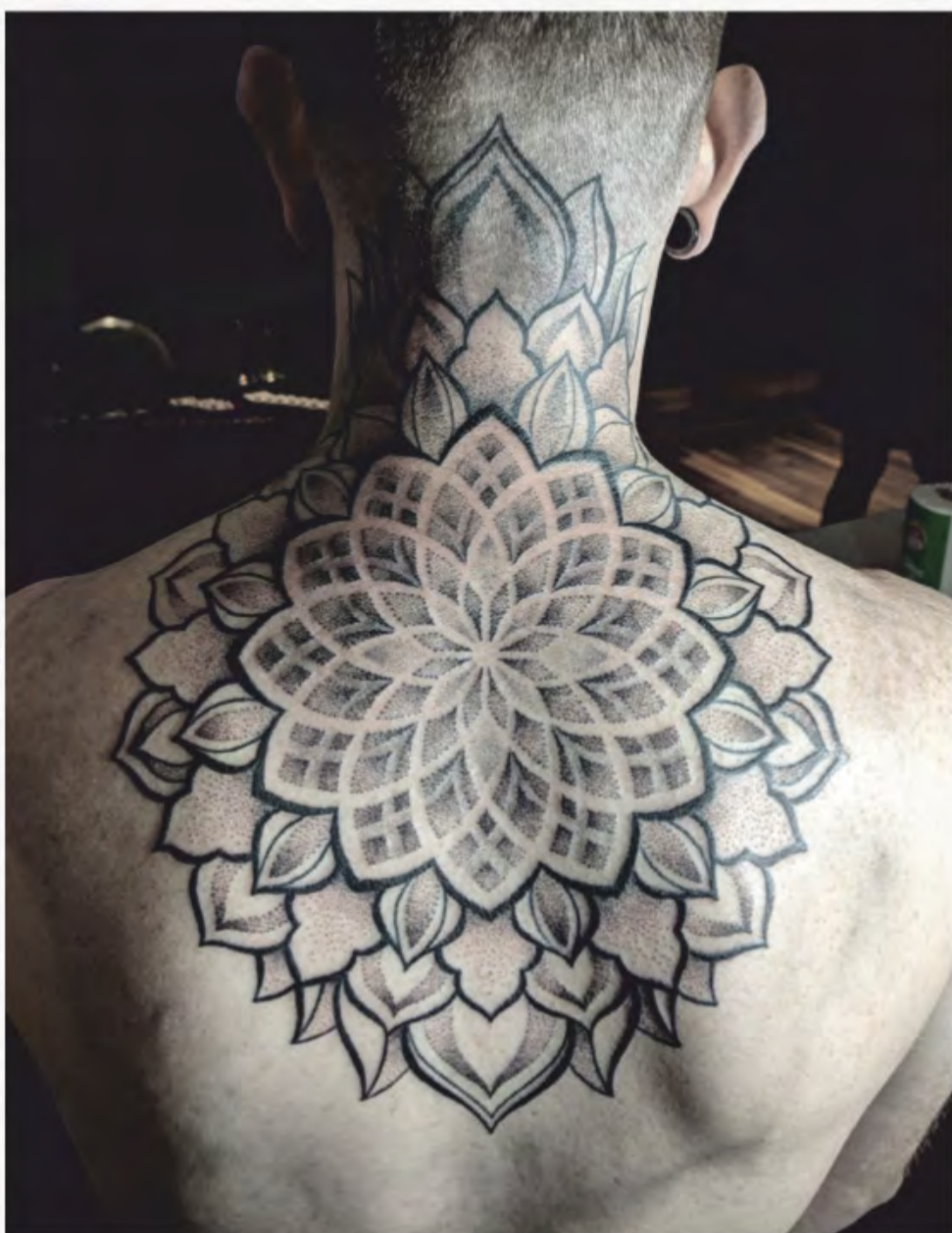


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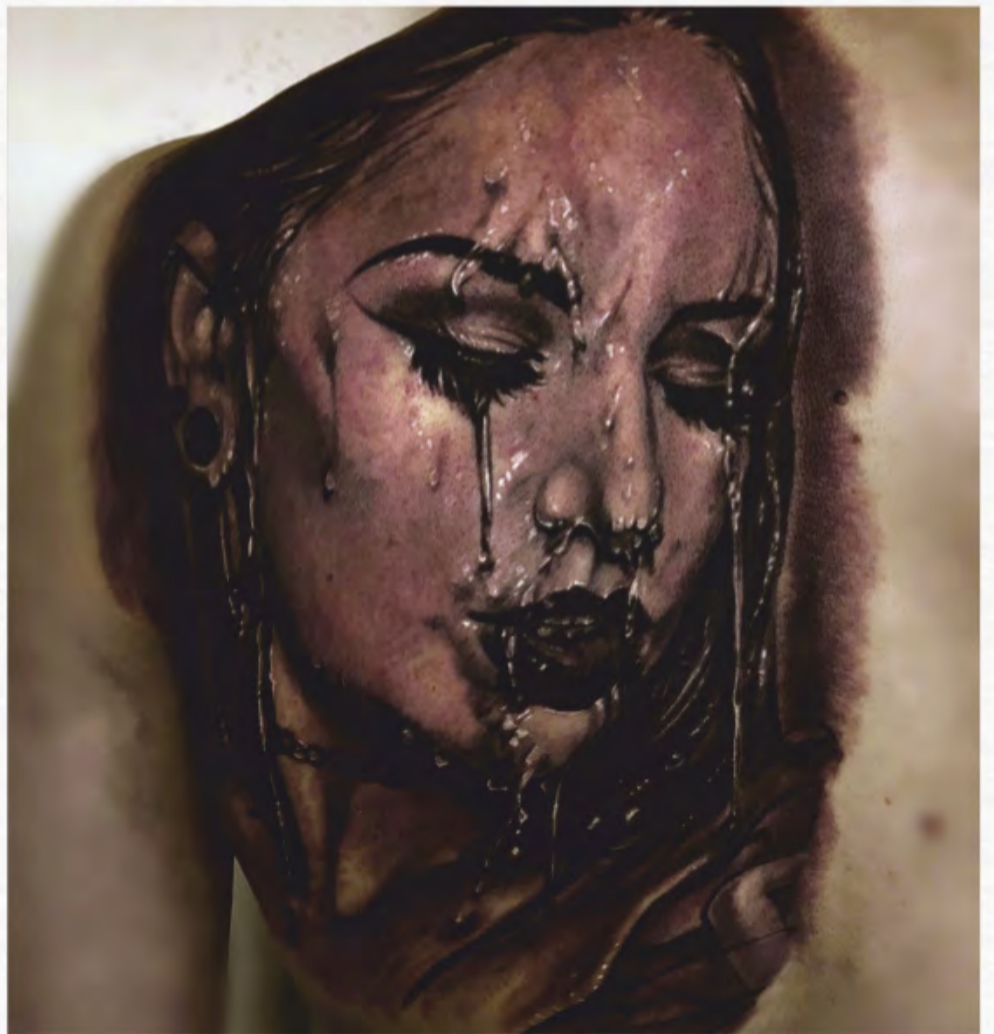
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TU R P R E E D



It's an interesting concept. Stick two old friends who are more or less the same age on either side of a breakfast table and let the tape run. Both detest social media and what it's doing to tattooing, both have been brought up on comics and cartoons, both look like HG Wells created them, both have something to say and both of them should know better. Maybe they do. Maybe they just don't care...

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DPE Tattoo Lounge

18, Christchurch Street, Fenton, Stoke on Trent,
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I've known Mark Poole for a long time. Along with (his almost wife) Emma (who luckily, is not here or she'd probably slap both of us real hard with a wooden spoon), Mark owns and runs DPE Tattoo Lounge. It's a place that looks like it means business, but that's kind of the point because when you get involved with Mark and tattooing, you get all or nothing.

Sitting between us are two large Orwellian mugs of tea because if there's one interview that has to be done old school, it's this one, but where, oh where to begin?

At the beginning is as good a place as any:

"I love my studio. We've got it split up into two floors. Down on the lower floor, we've got two guys and Emma. Rich Warburton is our traditionalist—he's been with us about six or seven years. He's that guy that turns up to work being reliable, solid and he's got such an amazing saturation in his work. Beautiful. We've also got Dennis Rhodes who hasn't been with us too long in the grand scheme of things and he's rapidly turning into our black and grey guy. He's going to be somebody to watch in the future—I love having him around because I hate doing black and grey!

Some people are like that—some people are genuinely happy doing what it is they're doing in the moment but I've known you long enough to say that's not what you are at all—and probably never will be. You're the guy that wants to push the boundaries. You never stop looking and being aware of



what's going on in the corner of your eye and I'd venture to say, those are the things that spark dumb-ass connections for you to move with.

"I can't afford to switch off! That progression for me is part of my life-blood. It's partly down to the fact that I can't even begin to operate without it. Everybody wants to progress and everybody wants to change but I'm not strictly driven by tattooing—the art is always more important for me.

"Constant change and constant development is so important because I have such a short attention span. What I love today, I'll fold into something that I love tomorrow. I never leave anything behind either but all of this, whatever it is that goes on inside my head, is totally geared up to it being the best tattoo experience for the client that I can give. The whole studio is client led actually—it's not just me—the most important person in the studio is the client because without them, I can't pay the bills.

"You've got to be constantly aware of how everything you do is going to affect your clients. We live in a city where there are fifty plus studio pretty much in walking distance and within that, there's some good tattooers too. I don't necessarily view them as competition and if one of us can't provide what somebody needs, I have

**WHAT I LOVE TODAY,
I'LL FOLD INTO
SOMETHING THAT I
LOVE TOMORROW.**





THE PRIMARY COLOUR THING, I DON'T THINK PEOPLE TOTALLY GET IT...



no qualms about sending them to somewhere I know will give them what they need—even if that studio never speaks to me, if I think that's the right guy for that person, that's where I'll point them.”

Drifting back to that comment you made about hating working in black and grey—I don't think that's a bad thing at all. You've been working your art long enough now to be able to dictate—at least to yourself—what you will and won't do, don't you think?

“I can't get any emotion into black and grey—my art is all about ambience and the subtleties between one colour and another... or even the lack of subtleties between colours.”

Which probably takes us right into the heart of Mark Poole 'the artist' though and the one thing you can't shake off—not that you'd want to—is how deeply ingrained comics are into your soul and I don't think that's an exaggeration at all.

“The primary colour thing, I don't think people totally get it—and they certainly don't get it now because they're put all the X-Men in black leather! I found it inspiring to see all that red and blue against the white. It set fire to something inside of me.







ANYWAY, I CAME ACROSS BANDES DESSINEES AND EVER SINCE I'VE BEEN HUNTING FOR NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS

It started me drawing and learning from comics, but as I've said before, the *bandes dessinées* thing hit me—I was about 23/24—and Groupil and Crisse did an album (book, not vinyl) where the backgrounds and the foregrounds were equally as important as each other which you don't often see unless it's a splash or cover page in an American comic.

“All of that crazy Franco-Belgian stuff like Tintin, really touched me. At the time I was doing Boris Vallejo realism fantasy stuff and was bored... very, very quickly bored. I guess this ties in with why I don't do black and grey actually, but there is no part of me that wants to do realism. I don't want to create something that actually exists—if you want that, take a photo, put a picture on the wall—it really doesn't float my boat. Anyway, I came across *bandes dessinées* and ever since I've been hunting for new ways of doing things, but the thing with it for me... it's not about the primary colours. It was the antithesis of the American stuff. It was very subtle. It was all about light, all about getting the atmosphere and it's now made it to the American comics too but not nearly as much as it is in the European market.

“Which is a long way of saying that that's what I do in my tattoos. It's not the same medium and it's a difficult, crazy

medium to work in. Trying to get that across when you're using purples along with peaches and yellows and golden tones... and a background... and then in front of that putting in stark blacks, greys and tones but then using source lighting which means you can lead people eyes where you want them to go—but it only works if you do the entire sleeve as one image and capture that one moment.

“That's the great difference between myself and many other tattooers is that I don't see an arm as being separate pieces. To me it's just one piece of skin, one continuous image that I need to work around the shape of. When I first started, I wasn't always successful at it—I was doing tattoos on the leg and the neck would be where the knee was and then the neck becomes not a neck at all! I didn't think that was avoidable but as with all art, I discovered it is. There's always another way.

“I don't think my tattoos photograph particularly well either—they're not designed to sit flat. They're designed as a living, moving piece. The back of the arm can also be the front and that's how my art works. It's a tough thing to get over. I guess I could use video but you lose something there as well because of light refraction and shadows... I



ALL OF THAT CRAZY FRANCO-BELGIAN STUFF LIKE TINTIN, REALLY TOUCHED ME

don't actually care about capturing it like that. Like I said at the beginning, it's about the client and their lifetime—not whether something looks good for the three seconds it takes from somebody to scroll over it on Instagram.”

You can't get much more old school than that. Tattoo + Client = The End. It doesn't need to cater to 17,005 followers. It needs to cater for one.

“I don't have that kind of a presence on social media anyway—I don't think it's good for tattooing as a whole. I don't even think it's for the good of society as a whole! I see it as being quite damaging because it makes tattooing appear to be disposable which it's not.

I really don't think social media as a whole is going to make a new, say, Jesse Smith, or indeed a Mark Poole, out of anybody. It just doesn't have the capacity to let you blow out of the water in that way. That kind of work has a story attached that involve people. I think people fail to understand that not all tattoos are created equal. To use an awful TV analogy, Loose Women is not the same as Lost even

though they appear on the same medium.

“I think the inspiration for me comes from the client, so they are heavily involved in the design process to a point. Maybe not the end product but certainly in the set-up. I need to give people what they've asked me to give but I also need to be true to myself—that's why they came to me in the first place.

“A lot of my work is on older people and a lot of it is cover up work too which means I have to choose my colours carefully and that can lead to some strange palettes sometimes, but if I can make the cover work, then I can make the art work too.”

Your clients though... they must come from a similar background to yourself? Either from a comic book or steampunk angle?

“To a certain extent yes—they might have a great fondness for 2000AD or something...”

But the point is there's a connection that's assumed before you even start. Nobody comes to you for a football badge tattoo or a traditional panther... so you're already in a winning position anyway.

“It's a small win though because it's so niche. I'll never be well known simply because of the kind of work I do. It's not for everyone. Once upon a time, I felt like I should be getting 'somewhere' and didn't seem to be—maybe it's something that other people within the industry are feeling too—but one day I realised that I didn't care or rather that I didn't need to care. I was comfortable and happy in my own skin doing my own thing and that was a much needed revelation. It moved me forwards no end.”

Knowing you pretty well, I think you would have hated being thrown up on a pedestal and then expected to perform.

“You might be right there too! But with that came the realisation is that the only people I can let down in me and the client... and if I don't let my client down, by proxy, I haven't let myself down either.

“Emma keeps me grounded... the level of commitment she gives me and the studio is incredible. Without her, it would all fall apart because her level of commitment to the clients is off the scale. She'll be horrified if this makes it into the mag for me saying that, but generally as artists, we never give credit where it's due to all of the people around you. We're not islands even though most of us tend to think we are.”

“Right now though and probably because of dealing with that 'letting myself down thing', I feel like I'm moving away from being a tattoo artist as such and I feel like I'm more of a tattoo craftsman. I think a lot of people will come to that realisation one day—there's hundreds of them out there already—but your attention to detail will be what



THAT'S THE GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MYSELF AND MANY OTHER TATTOOERS IS THAT I DON'T SEE AN ARM AS BEING SEPARATE PIECES

makes your craft and I think some of that's lacking now in the world. With social media, a tattoo is there and then it's not. Very, very disposable at the moment and that's not what tattooing is about in any shape or form."

It's easy to get jaded in the tattoo world. There's an expectation that everything should be great all the time, but the truth of the matter is that it's not. I think the world makes us this way—we give a voice to the 'bad' and never celebrate the 'good' because good is what you expected anyway.

"There is a lot of great tattooing happening out there—without question. I look at work and sometimes, I'm so proud to know these

people and to be among them. We should be giving the thumbs up in the real world because the digital thumbs up doesn't really mean anything simply because it's so impersonal and everybody does it out of habit. You stop paying attention but when you get stopped and told to your face, it means something. It really does."

We could have gone on forever with this (and we did—there's a lot on the cutting room floor) but friends or not, it's always a pleasure to sit down with somebody who loves their work, always wants their work to better and thrives on handing over what's been asked of them.

If that's what you want... you came to the right place. □





DO

FUTURE DESTRUCTION

Tarot cards are synonymous with our understanding of the occult; mystical objects used for divinatory purposes. Their iconic designs are believed by some to recount the past, examine the present, and foretell the future, the latter a terrifying unveiling of potential doom...

Yet, why are we drawn to the discovery of our grim destiny? One plausible answer would be that we are fascinated with our own failure and destruction, our end times. These cards provide believers a chance to study their future in an attempt to gain control over the uncontrollable. Similarly, the tattooist Łukasz Kaliński has a deep fascination with the aesthetics of tarot, his tattoo designs an attempt to study their complexity and reveal their endlessly enduring appeal. Kaliński's tattoos of Slavic gods and demonic entities depict our love for the destructive, our friendship with doom, and our thirst for knowledge. These are traits that we all conceal; the tattooist's designs an acknowledgment of our love of fear.

Your work features a range of mystic beings such as Slavic gods, shamans and forest spirits, what drew you to tattooing these otherworldly beings?

These sort of themes are so interesting to draw, you can let your imagination go wild. I think that everything started in my childhood. I have been drawing since I remember and I have

always been interested in the otherworldly. I suppose my very first inspiration were two volumes of books with old Polish fairy tales. All the main characters were devils and they were actually positive representations. The books were filled with grim illustrations and I still find them terrifying to this day. I became interested in fantasy literature, reading a lot about Slavic and Norse mythology. Then came my time at the School of Fine Arts, studying Graphic and Art History, learning lots of new drawing techniques. This time studying really helped me to develop my individual style. I'm now really interested in old graphics from the 15th – 18th century; fascinated by the period's sacral art, with all its references to myths and legends.

Do you find yourself being directly influenced by nature? Or do you find your inspirations in the work of occult literature?

I am more inspired by nature nowadays. I grew up in the countryside, where contact with nature is much closer. When walking through the forest collecting mushrooms I was always on the hunt for animal skulls. These days I use animal skulls from my collection as reference

Words: Steven Guichard-Kenny

WHEN WALKING THROUGH THE FOREST COLLECTING MUSHROOMS I WAS ALWAYS ON THE HUNT FOR ANIMAL SKULLS



LESS IS ALWAYS MORE, THAT'S WHY I REFRAIN FROM DRAWING EVERY LITTLE DETAIL

points for my designs. I also find literature being a main source of inspiration for my work. I read pretty much all of the time, but mostly prose. As for occult literature I love the work of Tadeusz Miciński. He was a legendary Polish poet; in his writings you can find a combination of Satanism, surrealism and occultism. He also expressed Pan-Slavism, a cultural and political movement striving for the liberation and unification of the Slavs. Polish and Russian literature has always been a large part of my life, that's probably why you can notice some Slavic references in my works.

A number of your tattoos mix and match various creatures and occult objects, how do you get to a final realisation of successfully combining these different elements?

I start my work with proper research. I care about being consistent not only visually but also conceptually. That's why at the beginning of a design I get to know the history behind certain creatures or objects.

That's one of the great reasons for designing around such themes, I still have the opportunity to learn new things and read interesting stories. Having some knowledge of the subject already means that it's easier to choose the right artefacts and symbols for depicted characters. I try to keep any symbolism to minimum. Creatures, their objects, and symbolism all together is typically too much to squeeze in into one design, especially if the design is on the smaller end of the spectrum. I have to cut some things out and make my designs clearer to be recognisable. Less is always more, that's why I refrain from drawing every little detail. The next stage of the design process is making small thumbnail sketches, getting my ideas on paper, and then choosing the best one and making a start on it. To be honest crafting and creating the design often takes more time than the tattoo itself.

Can you tell me a little about what goes into the process of tattooing such detailed line-work, what tools and techniques do you use to achieve such intricate designs?

In this case, I am a very simple man. I use only a few sets of round liner needles and one bottle with black ink. I work only using black ink; I tend not to use greywashes anymore. My tattoos can be summed up by two principle techniques; linework and pepper shading, and sometimes a mix of both. I try to vary the thickness of the linework to make my tattoos more impactful visually. I cannot imagine my work without lines; it's at the centre of my practice. Another thing that I use in my work is whipshading, I would actually say I find it the most enjoyable thing about tattooing in general. I use this technique to achieve some small details or to build shading. Also, it's a pretty fast and effective technique to execute.

A majority of your work is large in scale.

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages in working at this scale?

The first time that tattoos really impressed me was when I saw large compositions made by Paul Booth (@paulbooth). Big pieces are just more impressive. They require a commitment from the artist and from the customer as well; they have a two-way dynamic to them. In my opinion, the bigger the tattoo, the better the tattoo! The best example of big tattoos being impressive is at conventions, where you can see that large pieces are attracting the most attention from the crowds.



The advantage of tattooing big is the ability to implement more complex compositions and the certainty that the tattoo will at the very least be visually striking. I suppose when thinking about the disadvantages, there are some crucial difficulties with such a large composition. One of those is the planning, for example how much can I realistically make during the day? What shall I leave to next time? Then there is the pain element, the bigger the tattoo the potential for more pain for the client over a sustained period of time. One of my biggest dreams is to make a full body suit for someone someday.

It is evident that tattoo placement is an integral element of the design process, showing the tattoo at its best, how do you work with your clients to find the right placement for each piece? Do you sometimes have to explain that a tattoo will be better suited in a different anatomical location?

This is probably the most difficult part of my work because I have to match my ideas with the customer's expectations. People often have one specific idea in mind and one particular placement for a tattoo; it kind of becomes embedded. Meaning that sometimes it's difficult to convince them to change the placement or at least change the size of the design. Very often I have to convince the customer to increase the size or remove some unnecessary elements, so that the tattoo will look better aesthetically. Another thing that I regularly have to consider is how it's going to look after few years; I don't want the details to merge into one big black spot or smudge. It's a constant juggling act of trying to keep the client happy, getting the right size, and the right anatomical location; it's a lot of work!



Are there any artists working in the field of painting that have had a large impact in your working methodologies?

To be honest the artists that I admire the most are the old masters. There are so many of them to name, but my all time favourites are Hieronymus Bosch, Hans Memling, and Francisco Goya. I've always been fascinated by artists that create images detached from reality, sort of existing in their own space. I've also got to mention some Polish artists that I admire; Piotr Naliwajko, Stefan Żechowski and Zdzisław Beksiński. Each of them has a completely unique working style and methodology, with Żechowski and Beksiński painting only from their imagination.

There is a considered focus on incorporating the iconography of the occult into your designs, with many figures in your work chanting with talismans in hand, how did this interest begin? And how did it come to find a place in your work?

Symbolism in my designs is very important. If it's a specific character, just one symbol or one object can build meaning to the whole piece and its concept. First I do my research, attempting to find the proper symbols or objects that I want to include in my designs. When doing this research I tend to think, what is it about this object that I want to achieve? How can I imbue this design with symbolism? Such small elements can really have a significant impact on a finished piece; the meaning behind them is crucial. For example, in my tattoo and its depiction of Marzanna- Slavic Goddess of winter and death, I placed a key in her hands, the key here representing her control over the gardens of spring. Without this small item it would simply be another unspecified image of a witch. In my opinion, the arrangement of her hands and her slight gestures are integral to the piece, I feel these small elements can really break or make a striking tattoo.

Do you have your own personal talisman?

That's a really difficult question. I'm disappointed to say that my own talisman is probably my tablet in which I prepare my designs. I feel more confident with the iPad in front of me than with a piece of blank paper. The white space scares me a little bit! I've gotten so



used to drawing with my tablet that I cannot imagine switching back to drawing on paper everyday. Yet this sort of disappoints me as I appreciate traditional drawing, and the true magic that lies in freehand drawing.

In many ways with the popularity of the iPhone and its lure of the magical, the mobile device has become a sort of talisman of the 21st century. What other objects do we strive to worship?

I think that all devices that attract us the most, such as telephones, computers, and tablets have one thing in common, which is the Internet. Unfortunately, most of us are addicted to social media. Having said that, there is some magic in social media because everything looks like better than in reality. This sometimes worries me a bit, but mostly just makes me laugh. These days every event in which we're taking part in has to be recorded and photographed. I struggle with this during a tattoo session, when clients start brining out their phones to photograph the event. And it's always at the most inappropriate time, like when you tattooing precise, intricate detail. I suppose that is the curse of everyone that makes lines. I guess we are all under technology's spell!

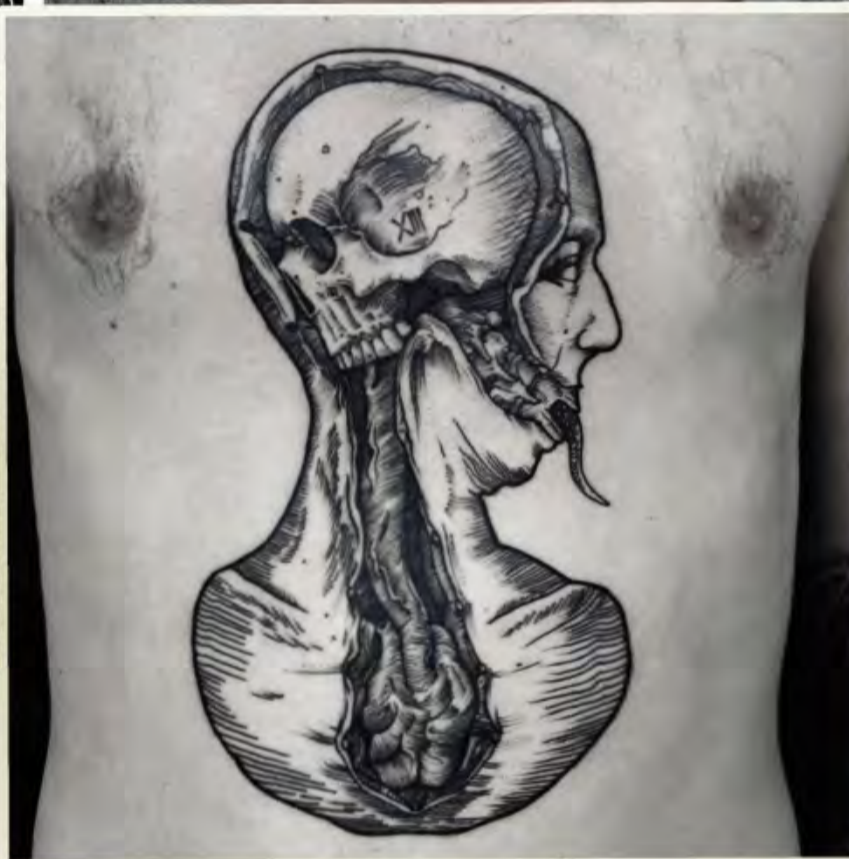
UNFORTUNATELY, MOST OF US ARE ADDICTED TO SOCIAL MEDIA. HAVING SAID THAT, THERE IS SOME MAGIC IN SOCIAL MEDIA BECAUSE EVERYTHING LOOKS LIKE BETTER THAN IN REALITY...

Your style is very reminiscent of tarot illustrations from the 19th century, how do different historical perspectives feed into your practice?

Personally, I'm not that interested in anything that requires faith, but I admire the visual aesthetics of tarot cards. Probably that's why you can find many references to tarot cards in my work. I'm also interested in engravings and etchings from the 15th - 19th century, which were filled with mystic and magic. My favourite cards are The Mantegna Tarocchi, made by Andrea Mantegna from the 15th century. And of course from the 19th century Thoth Tarot by Aleister Crowley, with illustrations made by Frieda Harris. My drawing work is largely inspired by engravings and old graphic techniques, and that's why artists like Albrecht Dürer, Hendrick Goltzius, Hans Baldung Grien, Francisco Goya and Gustave Doré have had the biggest impact on me.

I can't help but relate your tattoos to the imagery conjured by allegories and historical folk law, do you find yourself referring to these stories of the past?

Yes, indeed. I'm mostly interested in Slavic themes; these are simply closer to me. I try to portray characters from Slavic mythology in my own unique way, and refer to folklore only in some small details. I mostly draw flowers and wreaths in women's hair and simple necklaces,



... THIS SOMETIMES WORRIES ME A BIT, BUT MOSTLY JUST MAKES ME LAUGH.

trying to avoid literal patterns and designs taken directly from folklore. Slavic folklore is strongly connected to the forces of nature, and this is already a very exhausted theme. I think that Slavic folklore and mythological figures are getting more recognisable in the world, due to popularisation of the video game *The Witcher*, which is based on the novel by Andrzej Sapkowski. So I've always got to be thinking about my own individual take on a subject, how can I make these fantasy creatures distinctive in my own style? I find myself coming back to this question a lot.

Why do people like to be tattooed with such haunting designs?

I suppose its probably connected with a person's music taste. Most of my customers are metal-heads, so they are used to haunting images on metal album covers or a band's merchandise. It could also be that these tattoo clients have a deep interest in fantastic literature and mythology i.e. fans of Tolkien or Lovecraft. On the other hand, it might just be a purely aesthetic issue, with the client liking a particular drawing and design. Some people don't necessarily care about content or meaning, instead interested in a design's visual impact.

What does tattooing mean to you?

First tattooing was just my passion; now it's my job and the source of my family's maintenance, so it's incredibly important to me. I am glad that I can do something that I enjoy on a daily basis. If anyone in the past had told me that I would be earning money from drawing skulls and monsters I wouldn't of believed it. Tattooing also allows me to meet loads of new people, and gives me the opportunity to travel around Europe on guest spots. Working among great artists really changes my perception of art and tattooing, which is great as these people inspire me to develop my craft. I am grateful to the people who I have met on my travels and to the customers who want to have my designs on their skin. ▣

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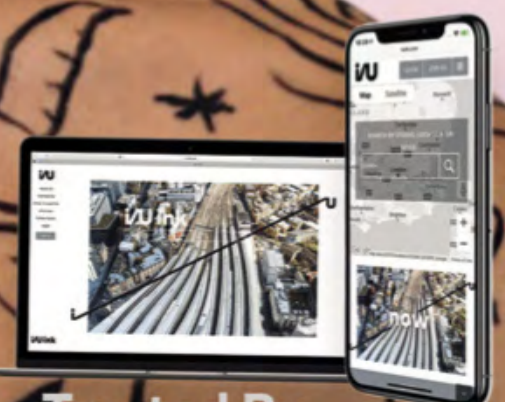
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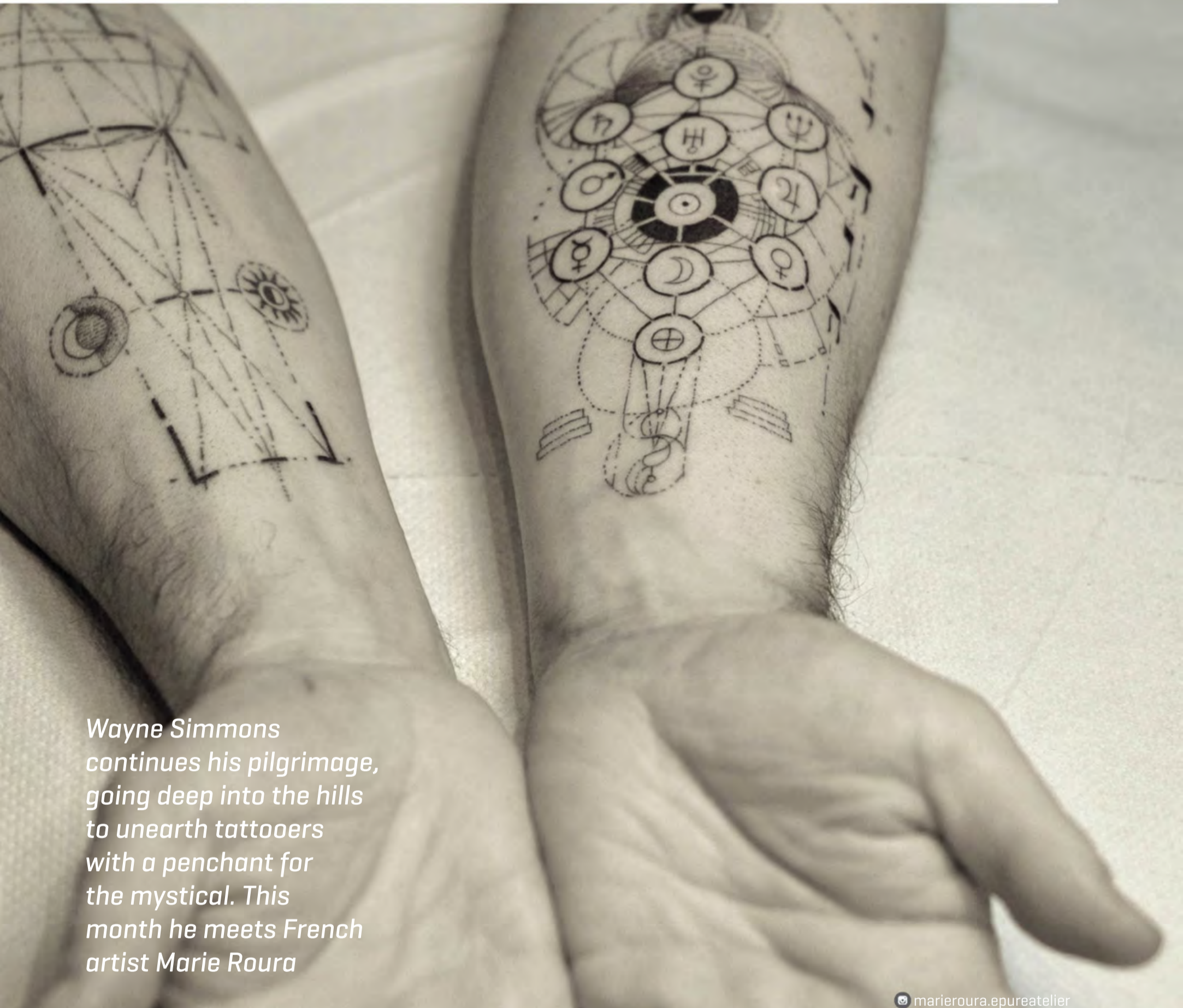
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AS ABOVE,



Wayne Simmons continues his pilgrimage, going deep into the hills to unearth tattooers with a penchant for the mystical. This month he meets French artist Marie Roura

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Tattoos with Higher Purpose

SO BELOW



Art has always expressed itself through symbols and ideas what words could not

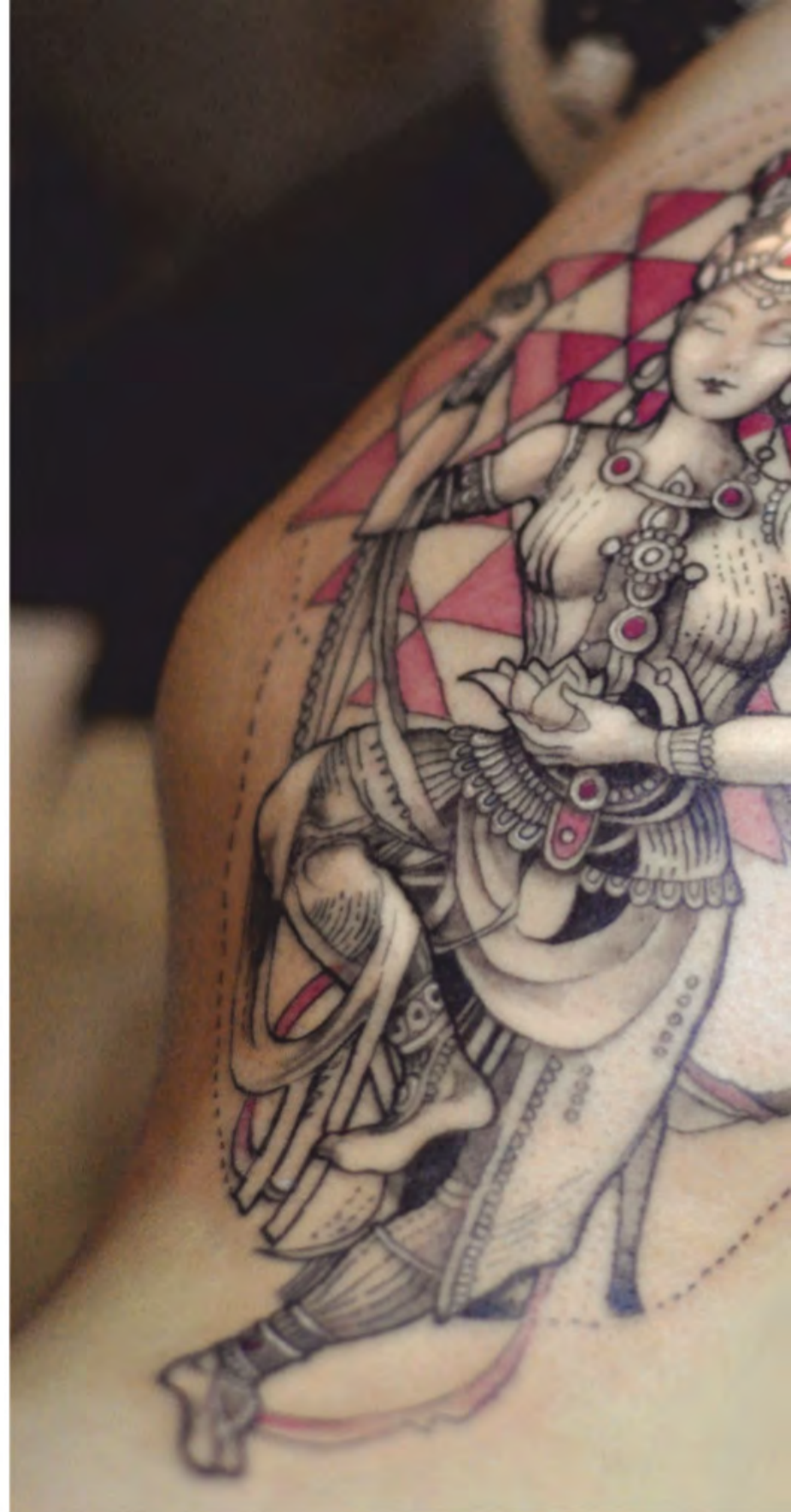
The immense power of imagery, of art, is not something you'll need convincing of if you're reading this magazine. That said, it's definitely something I've been reminded of lately while reconnecting with my old friend the tarot. Word has it that the tarot, which most practitioners accept began life as a card game in the middle ages, was adopted by occultists of the day worried that their teachings, widely seen as heretical by the Christian church, might get purged from history. The plan then was to hide their teachings in plain sight within the archetypal imagery of the tarot, each card adapted over time to hold the keys to enlightenment.

It's a concept not lost on Marie Roura. The Marseilles born tattooist believes that art and spirituality share a bond that goes much further back than the middle ages, a bond that is almost limitless when it comes to power—for better and for worse. “Art has always expressed itself through symbols and ideas what words could not,” she explains. “This is direct access, without involving the intellect. It's the world of symbols, allegories and archetypes. Spiritual images have a powerful and deep impact. That's why I always choose positive images. The dark side is in-

herent in human life but I never tattoo it.”

Her own spiritual path was marked out early, Marie having practiced yoga since she was thirteen. She also took up Shaktipat meditation, a deeply intuitive form of the practice, and soon found herself more open to a wide range of spiritual concepts including archetypal imagery. She is inspired by many forms of art, both ancient and modern alike, from the most primitive of cave paintings right through to technical or scientific drawings and much in between. But when it comes to what really drives her, it's that deeply rooted fascination with the unknown. “I am curious and this leads my work towards the spiritual, that which seeks to make sense of our lives,” she tells me. “Since the dawn of time, tattoos have held a sacred spot within the human condition. A large number of my clients are already involved in the spiritual path and come to see me for this reason. Tattoos are part of their evolution and I can relate to that.”

Like many artists I talk with for this series, Marie recognises tattooing as a ritual in and of itself. She tries to remain neutral and keep her own beliefs private during work, but if the client is receptive—and many of them



Since the dawn of time, tattoos have held a sacred spot within the human condition

are—she will go further, exploring and enhancing this ritualistic side further. “I tattoo with mantras and sacred chants. Rituals are important to create an atmosphere of serenity and optimise the tattoo experience, keep the person in a good energy, to help them deal with pain. Another ritual is to ask the person permission to tattoo, internally, without words.”

A consistent theme within Marie’s work is the divine feminine, a result of both her own convictions and those of her clients. Witches, Primordial Goddesses and Priestesses are all part of her muse, with love and compassion always being the underlying principle. “I am nostalgic for the age when women had a central place in society and their wisdom was felt and accepted all over the world,”

she says. “I believe in a harmonic balance between masculine and feminine energies and many women come to see me for a tattoo that will reconcile them with their feminine side.”

There’s a softness to her work, a wonderful otherworldly or ethereal quality, that might appeal to those looking for a more feminine energy within their ink. But for Marie, this is not just an artistic choice, but a pragmatic one, too—over her twenty years as a tattoo artist, she has honed a technique and style specially adapted to suit the medium of skin. “I have two types of drawing: the first one is pure drawing with no graphic limits. The second is drawing specifically adapted to tattoos: I do not exceed a certain degree of detail because, in my opinion, it evolves badly over time; I also make sure the skin is not bleeding and I use white ink which remains the best solution to prevent lines from closing.”

Marie is also aware of the more general long-term repercussions of a tattoo - how, for most people, it will be a mark they wear on their skin forever. As an artist, this is not a responsibility she takes lightly and so she’s not only







I am nostalgic for the age when women had a central place in society and their wisdom was felt and accepted all over the world

careful in terms of the look of the tattoo, how well it will wear over time, but also how it will holistically affect the person wearing it. “I think that the tattooed image has an energetic impact on the person, so you have to understand what is going on behind it,” she points out. “For that reason, I always give the client a history of the image, which can lead them towards a new understanding.”

In many ways, then, a consultation will be quite powerful and emotional—it could be an important marker for a client’s own spiritual evolution after all. I’m interested to learn how Marie involves her client more generally in the design process - how much of a say they have over how their tattoo looks and feels. In a way, her answer brings us full circle, reminding us of the power of art, its inherent link with spirituality and the importance of getting the energy transfer within a tattoo right. “I have a certain manner in working with my client,” she tells me simply. “What he or she wishes has to be



expressed precisely. Sometimes, I need to talk with the client, to see a photo. But I do not impose my views on them and the ideas come by themselves. I create intuitively. It is a real joy to work this way.” ▣

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The SERPENTS of BIENVILLE

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I had my first blackout when I was beginning college. After the blackout I refused to leave my dorm room for two weeks. What happened? To be honest, I couldn't tell you about a specific incident that brought it on, a traumatising event that happened the day before, or anything else that would have at least made sense. It felt as if my brain had rebelled against me, and I had no explanations

I grew up in a family where mental illness was openly discussed, with my mother being diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). Surrounded by instability I retreated inward and was able to rely on one thing, my mind. Unlike my surrounding, my mind was stable. I knew mental illness, and I was insistent that I did not suffer from it. I had two jobs from the age of 14, made good grades, and had a positive social life. I didn't do drugs, and didn't even have a taste of alcohol until I was 26. I had it all together, especially the relationship between my brain and I, or so I thought.

A year after my first blackout I had another one, this one being much worse. I was in my dorm room studying, and suddenly I had the urge to vomit. I was the vomit type, though I suppose that is an odd distinction to have. Gripping onto the toilet, I began throwing up everything that was inside of my stomach, and then everything went black. In a foggy haze I remember waking up on the quad



of my college. The university I went to was on a beautiful, pristine campus. It was like every college movie you could imagine, rolling green hills and beautiful architecture. Out of my haze I sat up and realised I was still in my sleep attire from the night before, and I was covered in vomit. In a blink of an eye I was out again. Finally I awoke in the campus medical ward, hooked up to an IV. I'm not sure how I got there, though the nurse said someone apparently helped me in.

After talking I realised that over two days had passed, and my brain had nothing to show for it. I just sat, in fear and silence, realising that I had lost all connection with the brain I once knew. I told no one, and when asked where I was for two days I attributed it to "social anxiety".

Years would pass, and I continued to bury the complex relationship with my brain and the chemicals within it. I was silent out of fear and shame. This pain compounded, and the racing thoughts grew louder, and soon no work I did could drown them out. At 26 I started my convoluted relationship with alcohol. Drinking brought me back to the person I thought I was before the break downs, before



AT 26 I STARTED MY CONVOLUTED RELATIONSHIP WITH ALCOHOL. DRINKING BROUGHT ME BACK TO THE PERSON I THOUGHT I WAS BEFORE THE BREAK DOWNS...

the suicidal ideations, before the disintegration of the relationship with my brain. Drinking took over. The more I drank, the more people liked me, the more stories I had to tell, the more life I had to live, or so I thought. My brain and I believed that my only solution was to drink myself into my perceived “sanity”, yet the twist is that I have the brain of an alcoholic, an unreliable narrator. For six years I twisted down this road, forming incredible friendships, partnerships, and an amazing marriage; but with every drink the blackouts increased, and I was starting to lose those memories I was creating. My brain had become hazy, and I was losing touch with everything I held dear, while running from everything that I feared.

Sobriety came in the form of love and patience. My wife had given birth to our first daughter, and my loving family was beginning. I put them in some really difficult situations due to my lack of responsibility drinking, and after one particularly bad one, I had had enough. I had to take control by letting go and realising I had a problem, one that I was trying to self-medicate. I got sober, and I confronted the complex relationship with my brain. After years of therapy, newly sober, I finally asked “What is your diagnosis?” to my therapist. We worked with my family doctor, several specialists, and other counsellors to start to shine a light on my inner workings. Combinations of treatments began to help me through depression, bi-polar 2 disorder and a severe sleep disorder. I began to understand my

thoughts, and for the first time, I began to feel free. My racing brain was finally leaving the cage I had created for it, yet the journey was just beginning. Now though, I feel equipped and ready to move forward. One of the tools that I use is honest, genuine communication and connection, particularly with my clients, like Samantha Howell.

I began tattooing Samantha almost three years ago with an Edgar Allan Poe piece, and she was pretty much the text book perfect client. She sat well, she was easy to tattoo, and she said all the right things about how much she loved her tattoo, always saying it when I needed to hear it. Time passed in between projects and eventually a consultation rolled around to discuss her newest piece this past year. It was at this consultation that I realised how much we had in common with our complex relationship to our brains, and how much she had been through. During the discussion for her piece, we both fought back tears when discussing our commonalities. I knew how it felt to not be able to trust your brain, to feel those iron bars around it, and doing this tattoo for her helped me exercise that. Here is Samantha’s explanation, in her own words.

“My story is a familiar one, but I really would like to take the time and share it. After years of many difficult medical diagnosis; physical and mental, past trauma, and many other circumstances, I found myself in a very dark and scary place inside of my own head. Consistently saying I could never have a real life. Allowing my





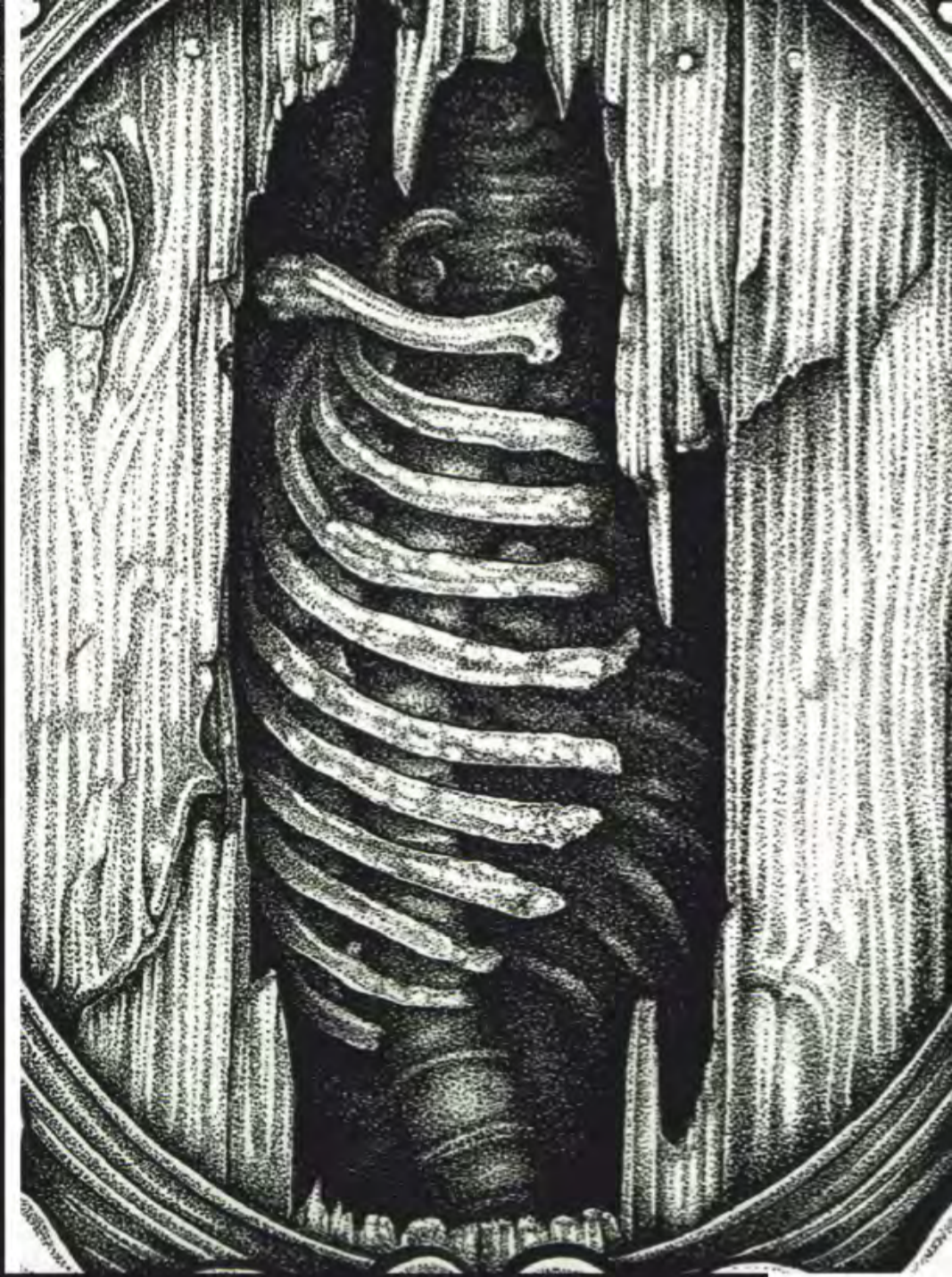
AFTER BEATING MYSELF DOWN DAY IN AND DAY OUT OVER AND OVER FOR A PERIOD OF YEARS, I WAS SO LOW THAT I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE DESIRE TO MERELY EXIST ANYMORE

own thoughts and fears to build a cell just for me inside of my own mind. After beating myself down day in and day out over and over for a period of years, I was so low that I didn't even have the desire to merely exist anymore. I thought I wanted to end my life. Truly thinking about the finality of it all, I felt scared by that, so a different choice was made and I wanted to get better, not just simply end. I sought help, went into an outpatient therapy program in late May of 2017. I went through the motions of the therapy, but now I realise that I honestly was not really applying as much of an effort as I portrayed. I thought I was doing well for a short while. Then life happened again and I panicked; relapsing back into suicidal ideations. I was so tired and disappointed. I came to the reason that I was seemingly so much better from the program only due to my desire to make the people who wanted me to heal feel happy. I didn't want to disappoint anyone so I made myself believe I was better.

The ideations quickly got worse so I made plans, started putting my affairs in order. I knew when and how, knew what I wanted to say and do before hand. Then the day came, then the hour came... suddenly in single moment of clarity right before it was too late I understood it was happening again, but overwhelming worse. That terrified me. I decided to check back into the same therapy program the following morning. This time truly putting in the effort that was desperately needed. After many harsh

realisations, messy work, uncomfortable emotions, and even more pain... I did it. I wanted to live and not just live but thrive, and I wanted to do it for myself. I continue to work on myself every day. It is a daily progression. Not just some wonder drug and some positive affirmations, but actively trying. Not every day is a great or even a good day, but the days haven't been even a fraction of how it used to be. I'm happy with myself for quite possibly the first time in my life. I still have health problems and unexpected life events/circumstances, but I know I'm not alone. I actively stay on top of medications, listen to my body, keep my appointments, and try for myself everyday. Finding the right course of healing wasn't instantaneous. The same medicines and therapy and approaches do not





THE FINALITY OF BREAKING FREE FROM THE PRISON I BUILT INSIDE OF MY BRAIN IS SO BEAUTIFULLY DISPLAYED ON MY BODY FOREVER

work across the board for all of us. Finding what worked for me took many tries. But being determined to find my best recovery route kept me going. Once I did, something clicked and aligned so beautifully. I advocate for myself, family, friends, and strangers who suffer with mental and emotional struggles. I want people to know it can be hard, but if we really want to, it is completely possible. Please don't give up on you.

November 18th, 2017 was the first day I did not have a single life threatening thought. Since that day, I still have not. I decided to honour my first year completely ideation free by reaching out to Sean and asking for his help in signifying this new found freedom from caged thoughts. My struggles and my liberation have been executed flawlessly. The finality of breaking free from the prison I built inside of my brain is so beautifully displayed on my body forever. Nothing has been more freeing. This means the world to me because not only is this art so personal and special; it's a conversation starter. This tattoo gives an opening to discuss emotional and mental health when someone else may be too scared to. It gives a chance to share a story of survival and possibly help someone else who is hurting. The best thing now is not being afraid to admit when I hurt, to ask questions, to reach out to people, to seek help, and talk. I'm so thankful for the dark place I was in because I know myself more as an actual human being now. I'm so very fortunate for those I have

in my life who have stuck by me, talked to me, extended a hand, and watched me grow through the process. I could not be more thankful for my life and all of the connections I have made. Negative thoughts can be so possessive and can also be tricks we're unconsciously playing on ourselves. Not every thought is a truth. We never need be too afraid to admit something is wrong; we must acknowledge how we feel and ask the uncomfortable questions. We may not see it now, but we are valid and we are special. We all deserve to know and feel that about ourselves. It's always possible to break free from your mind. Today I actually can say that I myself am living proof of this."

I am so grateful to Samantha for sharing her story, sharing mine with my clients everyday for the same reason; to connect with those who feel alone and hopeless. You are not alone, if you have felt that sting of isolation and distrust of your mind, please know that you deserve to feel better. Take your pain seriously, I do, and please get help. If you need help right now, one avenue is texting "home" to 07786209697 in the UK or 741-741 in the US and a real crisis counsellor will talk you through it, no questions asked. They will be there as long as you need them, and can also help you through other needed avenues and channels. Please know that you are relevant, and you are loved. If you or someone you love needs other channels you can visit papyrus-uk.org in the UK or www.nimh.nih.gov in the US. ▣

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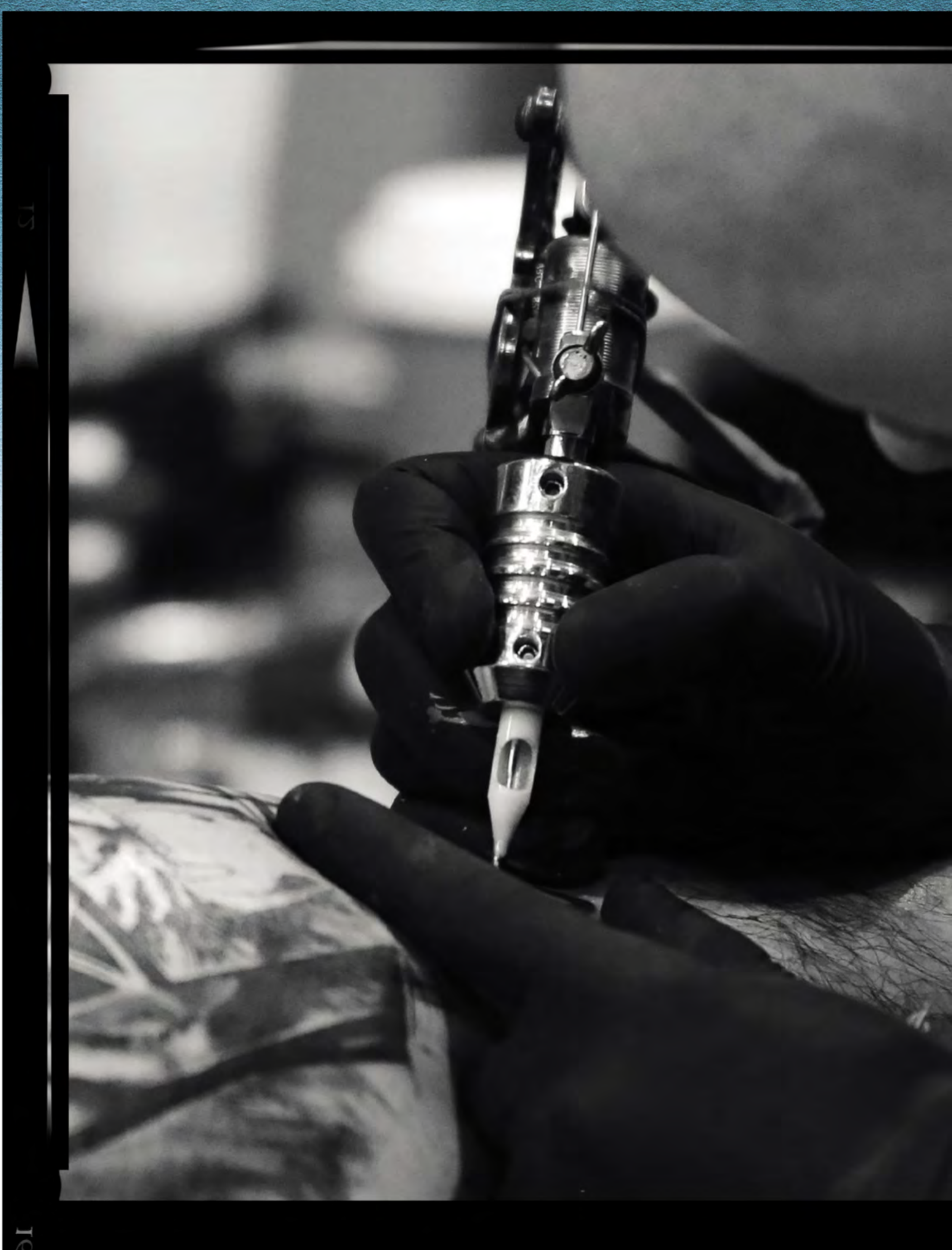
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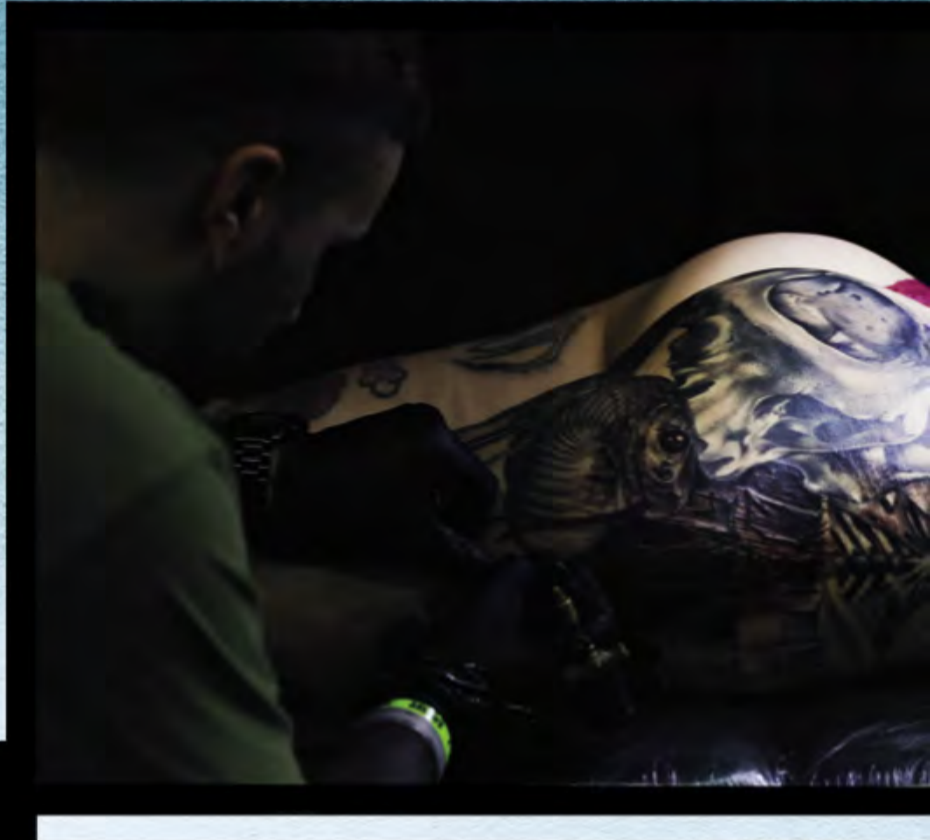


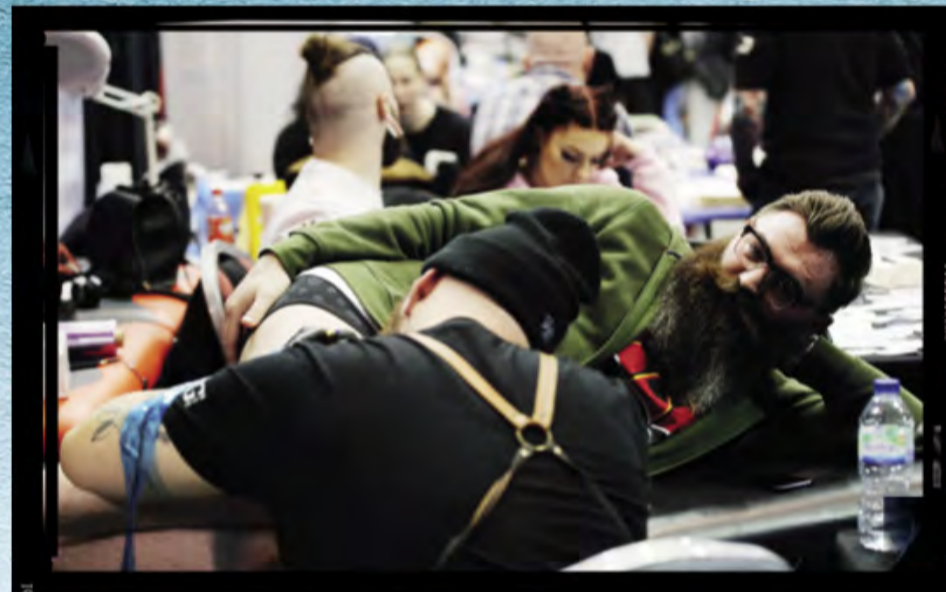
This year was our tenth Tattoo Freeze and brother... how time flies. Hard to believe that this (not so) little show has grown into one of the most consistent in the UK calendar. Aside from 222 of the hardest workers in the country, I think it has something to do with everybody going stir crazy over the Christmas period and wanting nothing more than to get together with other like minded people as soon as possible.

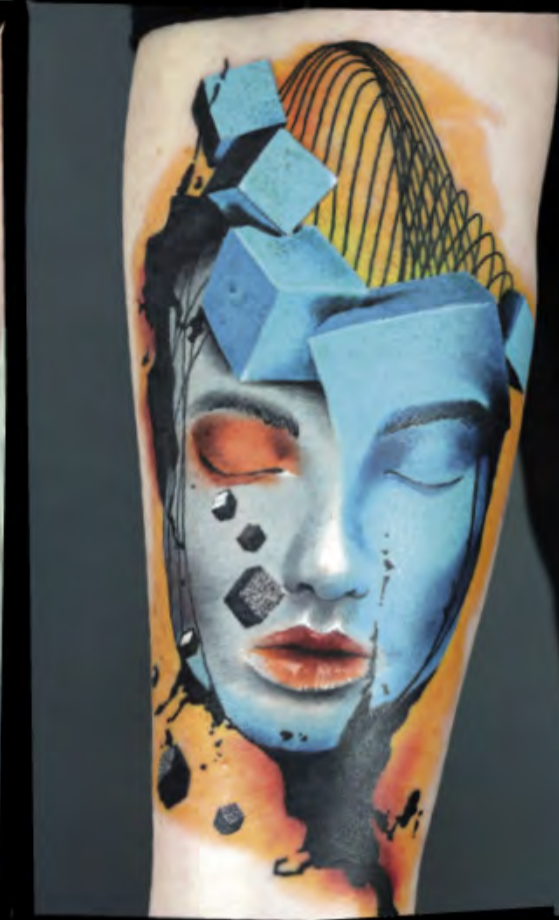
That's pretty much how we feel about it anyway.

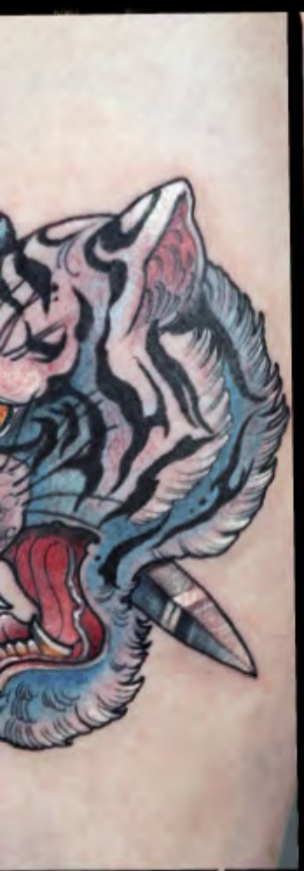
As we're seeing all over the country (and indeed, a lot of the world) there are plenty of new faces worth talking about. Once upon a time, I knew every single face at Tattoo Freeze - this year, not so at all. Dozens and dozens of new faces are surfacing all the time and some of them have a serious future at their feet if they can hold onto their sanity along the way.

As we progress through the year, we'll pick off some of these people and get more in depth with them but for now... take a look through some of the work put out across the weekend. If there's not something there to rattle your cage in the inspiration stakes, you're in the wrong game. ▣









SATURDAY JUDGING

(Mark Poole & Sion Smith)

AVANT GARDE: WINNER

CAM BAIRD

AVANY GARDE: RUNNER UP

SEAN NEWMAN

BLACKWORK: WINNER

DAVE VALENTINE

BLACKWORK: RUNNER UP

JESSICA BROWN

TRADITIONAL: WINNER

BRIAN HEPWORTH

TRADITIONAL: RUNNER UP

MARC NUTLEY

COLOUR: WINNER

MONIKA KOCH

COLOUR: RUNNER UP

IAN CARTWRIGHT

BEST OF SATURDAY:

MONIKA KOCH

Andy Graham by Sean Newman Avant Garde Runner Up

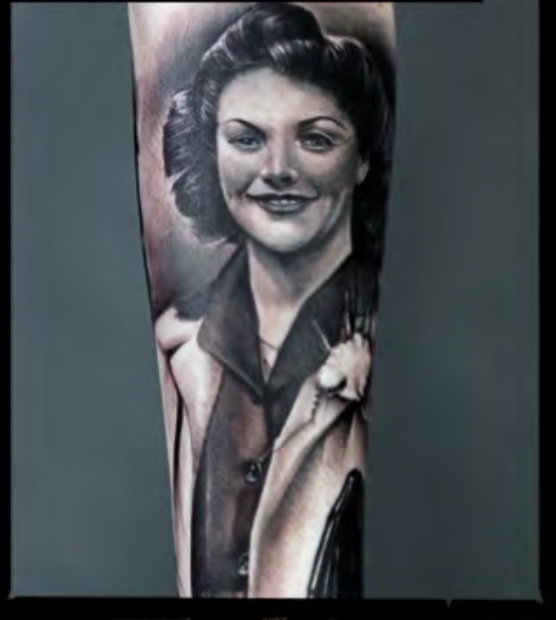


Ashleigh Carter by Ian Cartwright Runner Up Colour

Damon Taylor by Jessica Brown Blackwork Runner Up



Georgia Meany by Brigi Fuzes RUNNER UP REALISM



Gordon Mackay by Gabbie Vasquex Best Neo Traditional WINNER



Jack Woolley by Sean Vaux BEST REALISM WINNER



Cam Baird by Art Biggs Studio WINNER Avant Garde



Jake Hanley by Shaun Wainwright Best Oriental WINNER



Josephine Langer by Anthony Lennox Runner Up Neo Traditional



Kate Wilkie by Dave Valentine Best Blackwork WINNER

Georgia Meany by Brigi Fuzes Winner Black and Grey



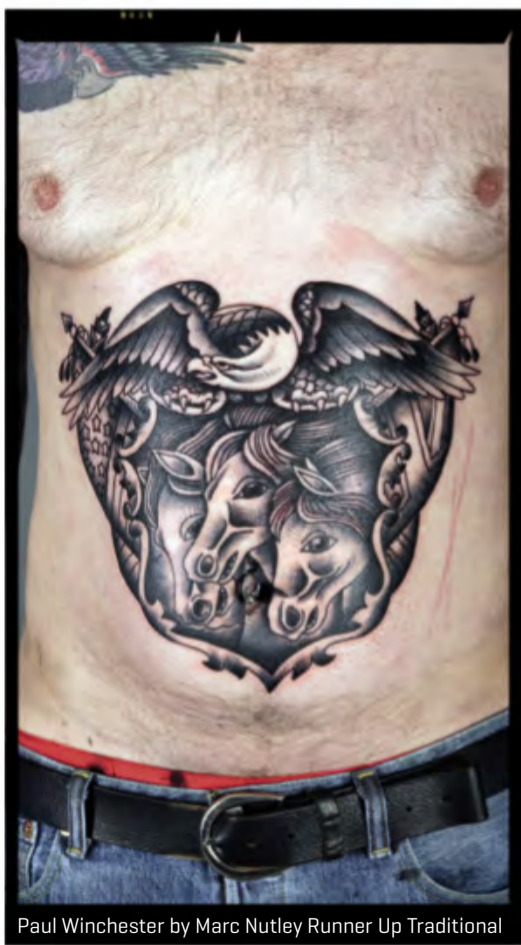
Stephen Hannah by Brian Hepworth Best Traditional WINNER



Kieran by James Conway Runner Up Oriental



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Paul Winchester by Marc Nutley Runner Up Traditional

SUNDAY JUDGING
 (Mark Poole & Sion Smith)

NEO-TRAD: WINNER **GABBIE VASQUEZ**
 NEO-TRAD: RUNNER UP **ANTHONY LENNOX**

ORIENTAL: WINNER **SHAUN WAINWRIGHT**
 ORIENTAL: RUNNER UP **JAMES CONWAY**

REALISM: WINNER **SEAN VAUX**
 REALISM: RUNNER UP **BRIGI FUZES**

BLACK AND GREY: WINNER **BRIGI FUZES**
 BLACK AND GREY: RUNNER UP **CLARKE DUDLEY**

BEST OF SUNDAY: **BRIGI FUZES**

BEST OF CONVENTION: [Chosen between Best of Sat/Best of Sun]
MONIKA KOCH

25221 Neg Em 34455



Brigi Fuzes Best of Sunday & best Black and Grey



Liam & Monika



James Conwy Runner Up Oriental



Anthony Lennox Runner Up Neo Traditional



Gabbie Vasquez Best Neo Traditional Winner



Monika Cox Best of Saturday Best of Convention Best Colour



Sean Vaux Best Realism Winner



Shaun Wainwright Best Oriental Winner



Award winning artist
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from this years

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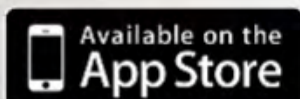


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Carl Merrell



Dale McGovern



Dale McGovern



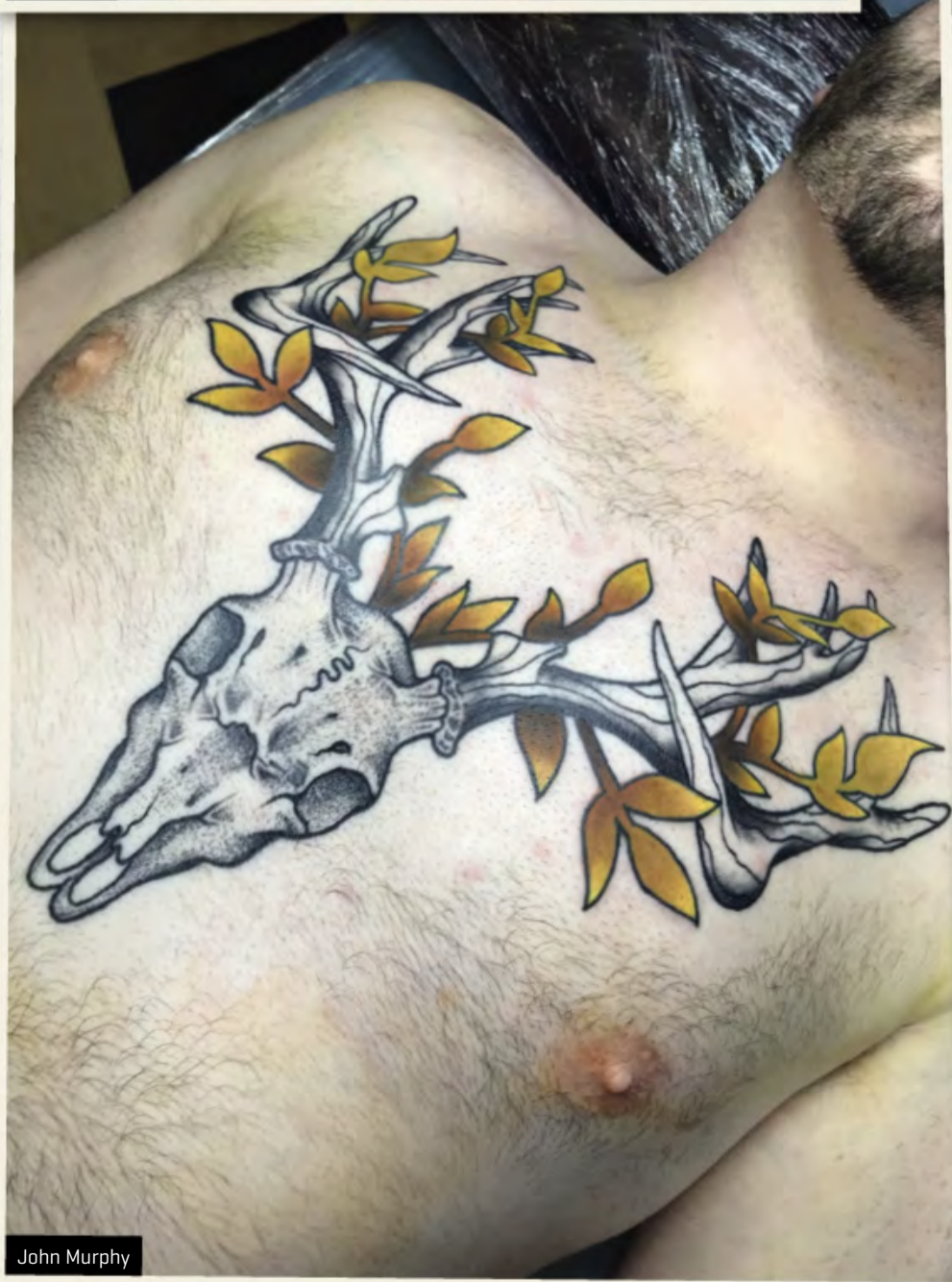
Ian Budge



Ian Budge



John Murphy



John Murphy



Jon Potter



Zelda Behr



Laura Firth



Lee Bailey



Leigh Coombs



Lee Bailey

Shaun Von Sleaze



Raymond Temperley



Tanya Buxton



Paddy Turpin



Tanya Buxton



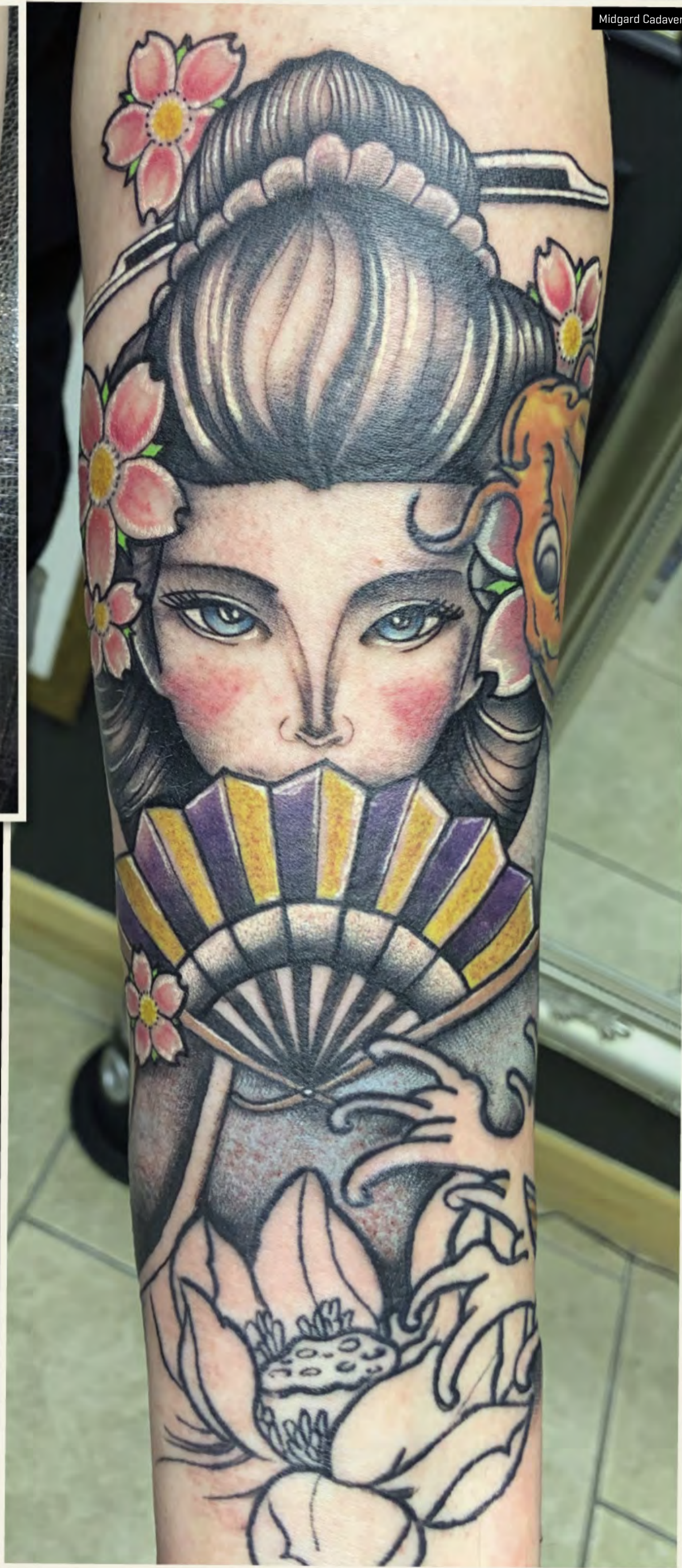
Pete Vaughan



Martin Smith



Max Pniewski



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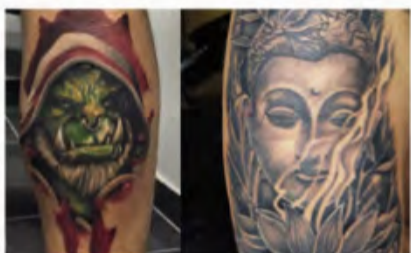
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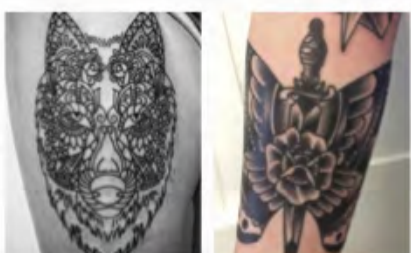
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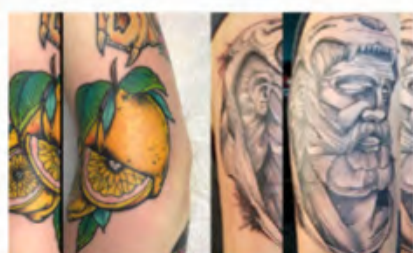
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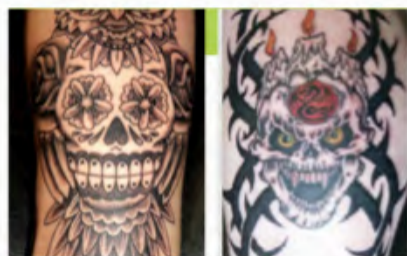
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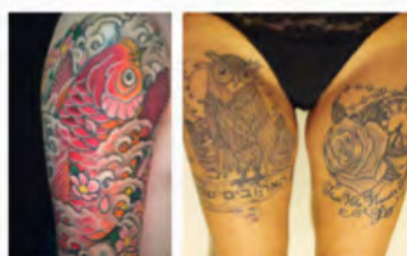
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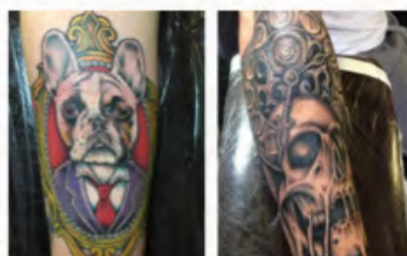
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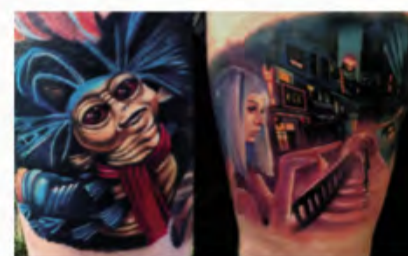
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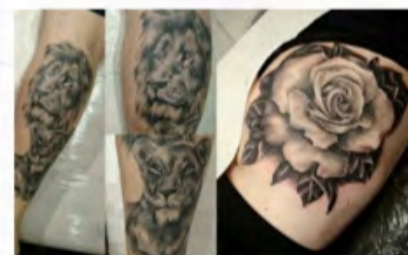
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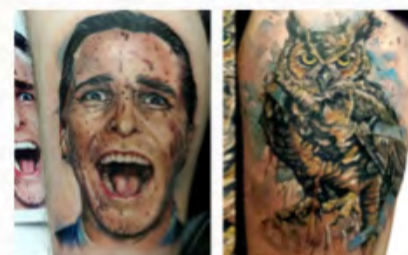
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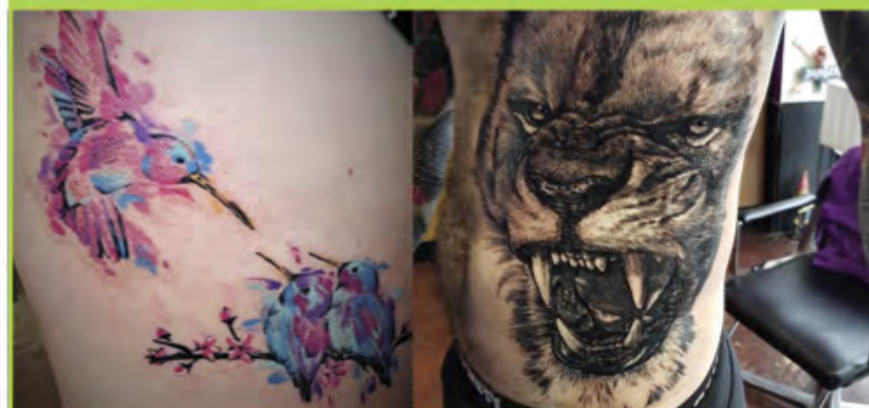


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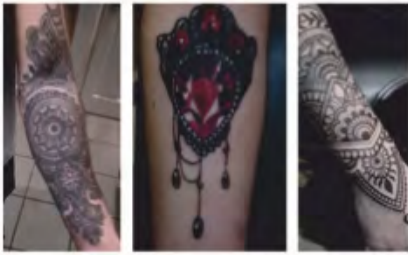


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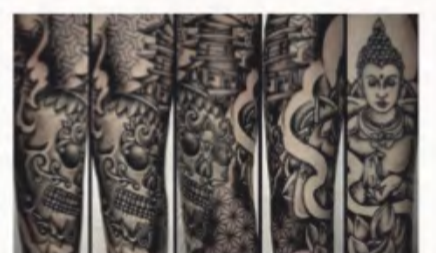
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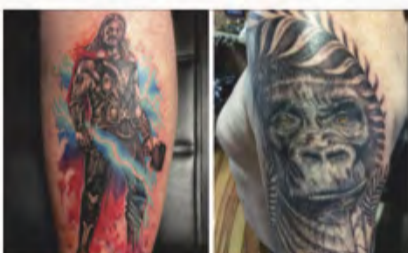
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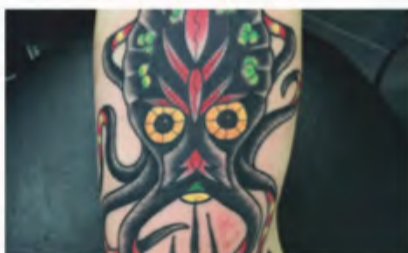
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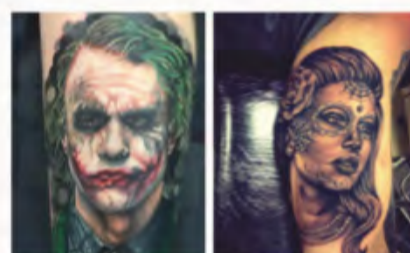
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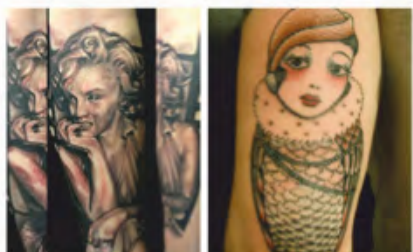
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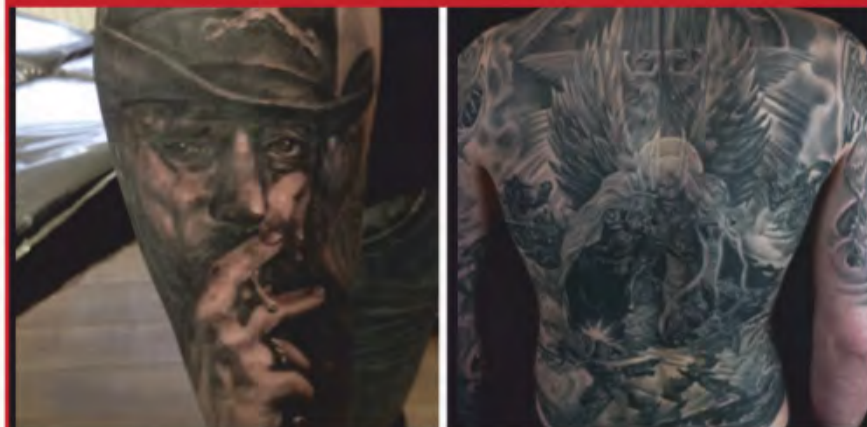


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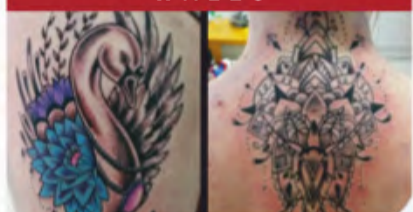
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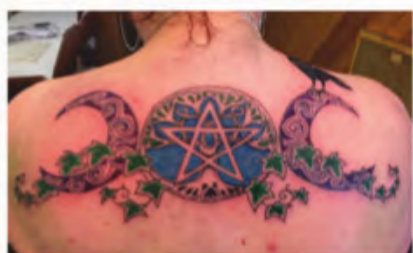
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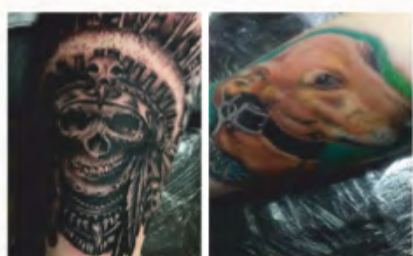
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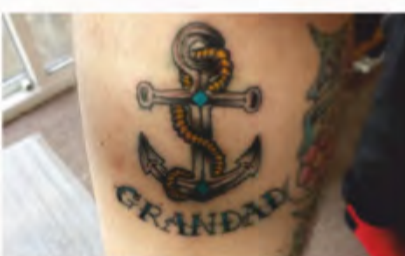
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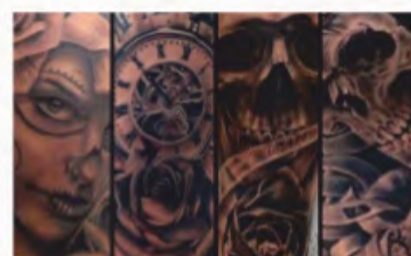
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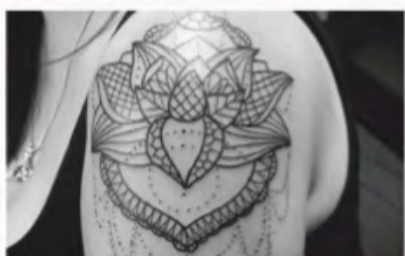


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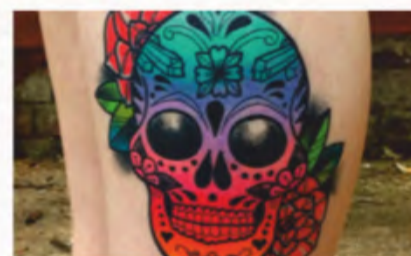


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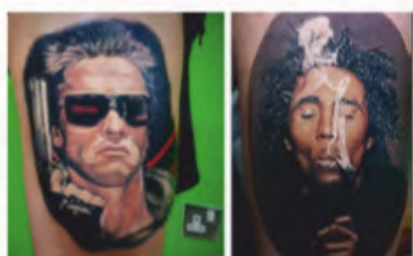
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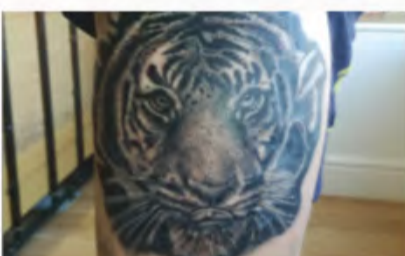
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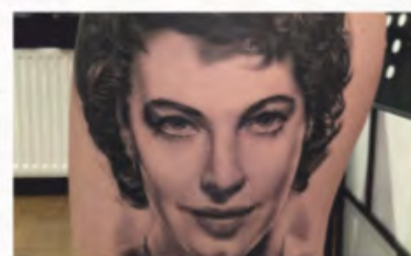
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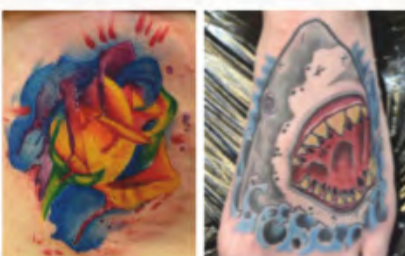


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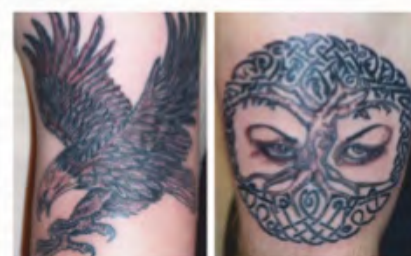
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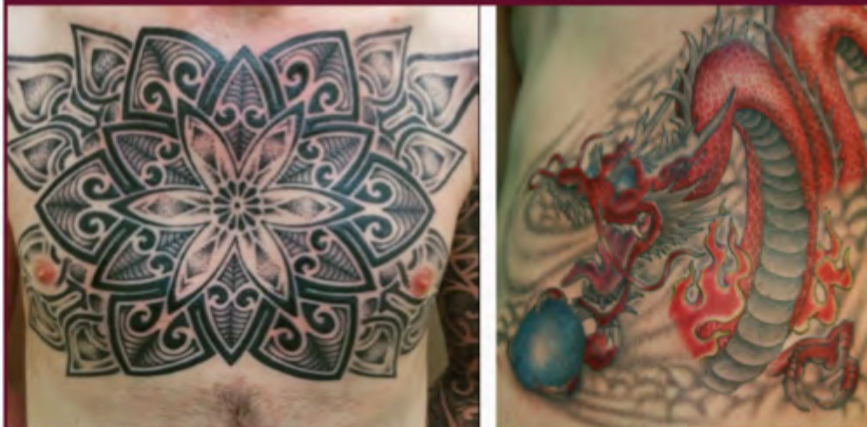


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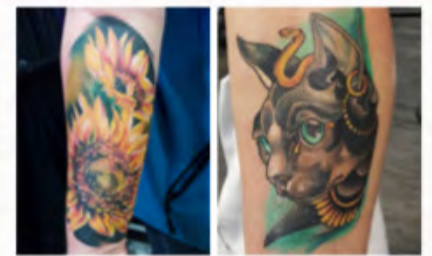
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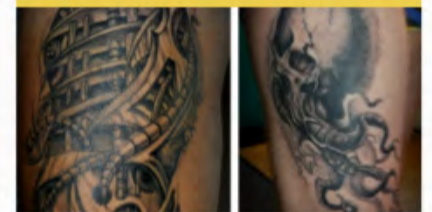
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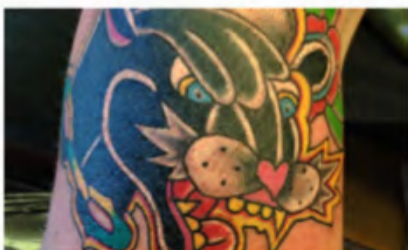


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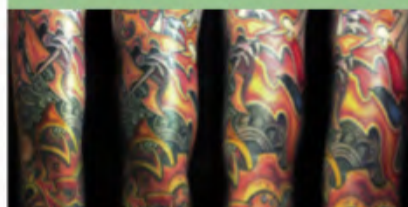


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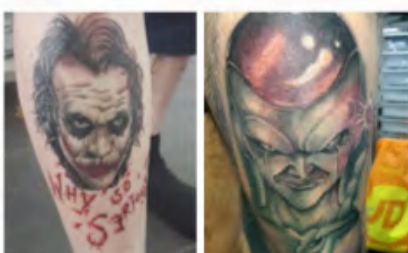
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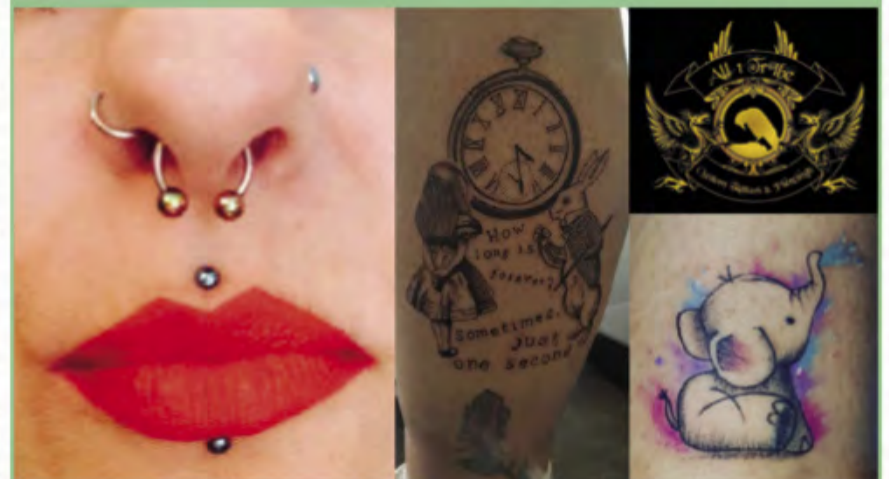


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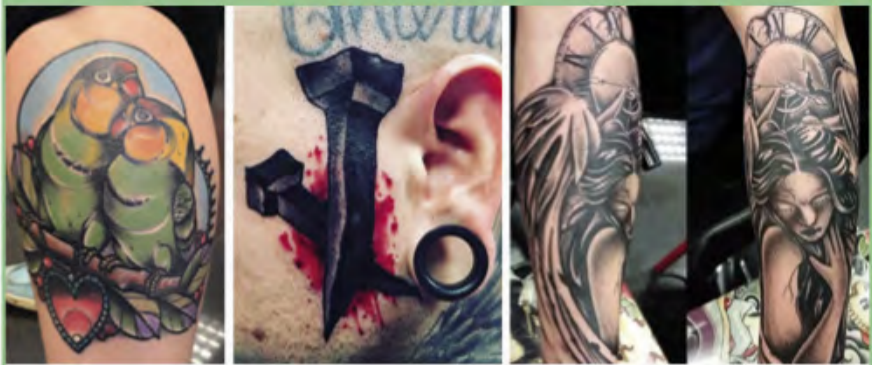
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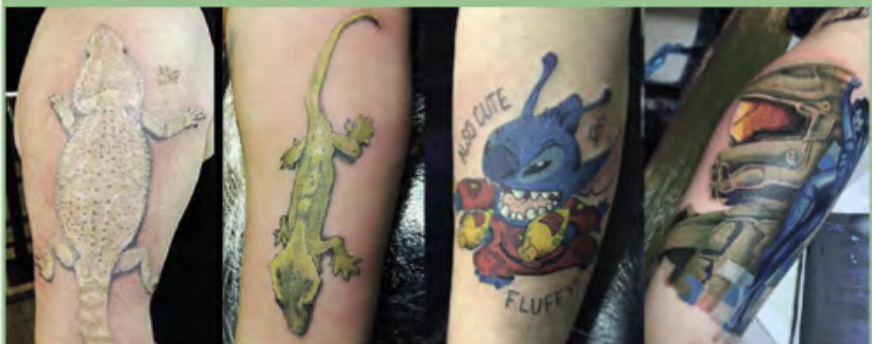
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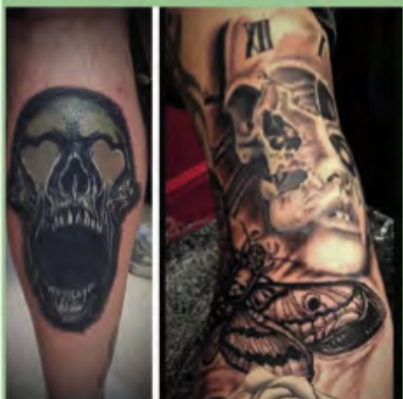
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01933 805413 MADTATTERS110@GMAIL.COM ARTISTS - THOR, NAT & LEIGH-AN

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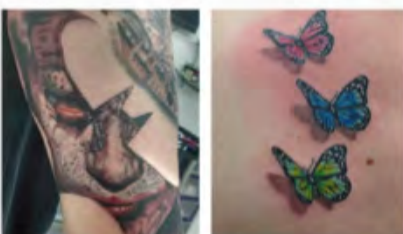


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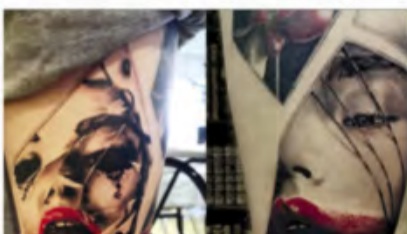
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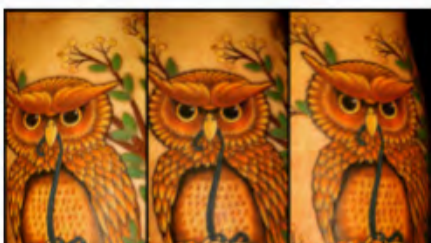
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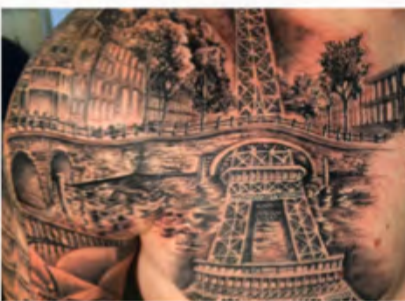
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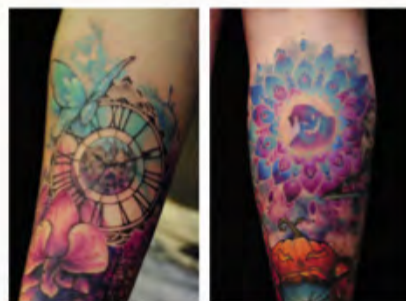


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SMOKINGGUNS110@GMAIL.COM ARTISTS - MARK V, MCILVENNY, ABBIE & BILLY

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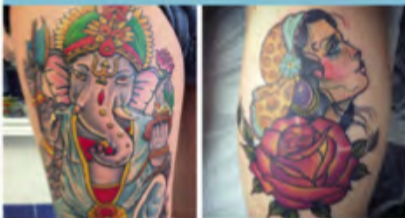


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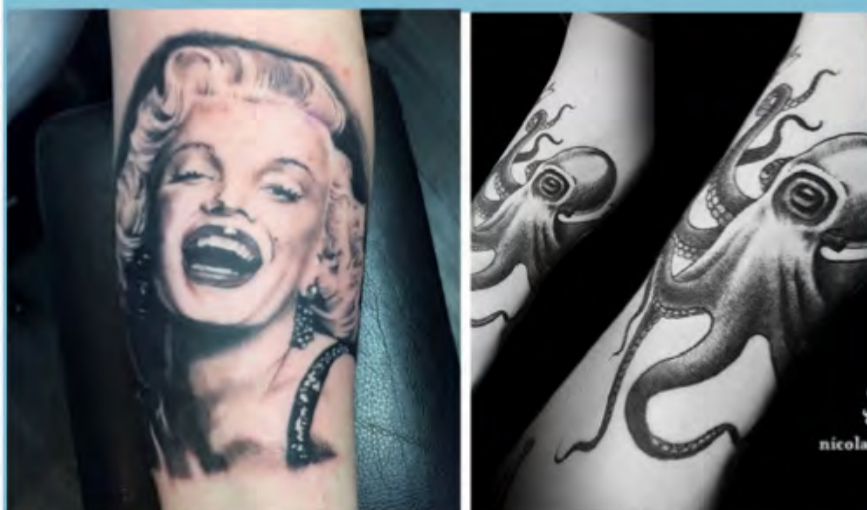


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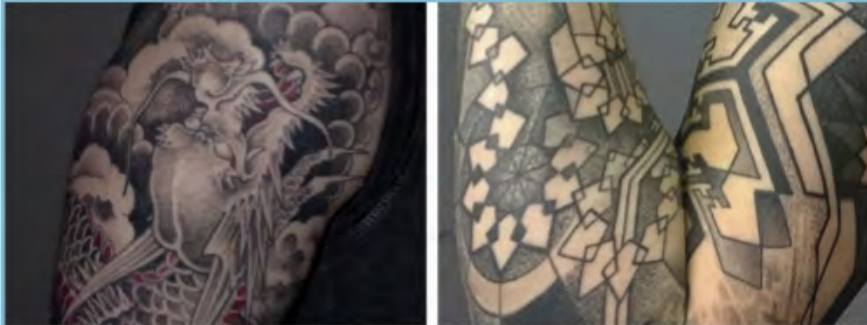
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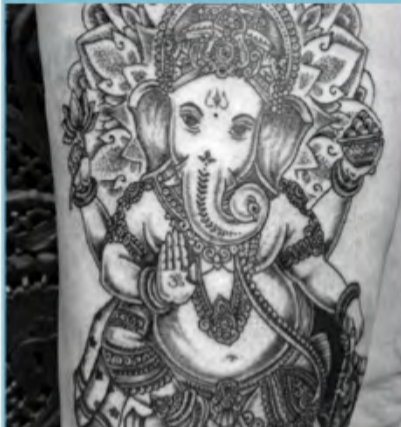
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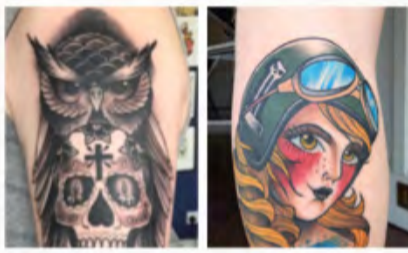
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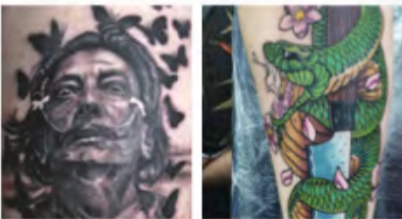
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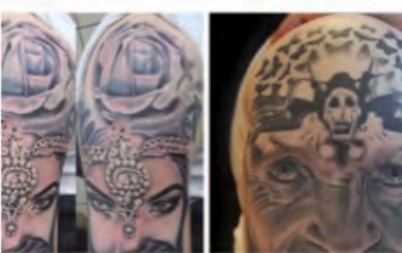
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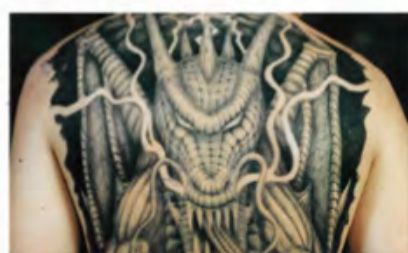
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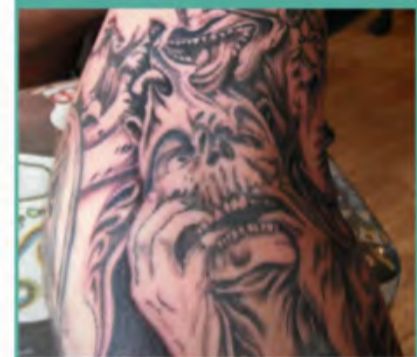
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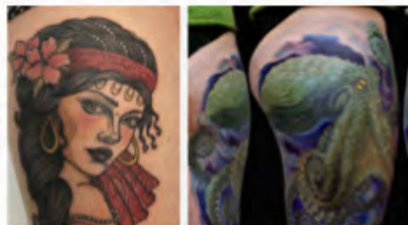


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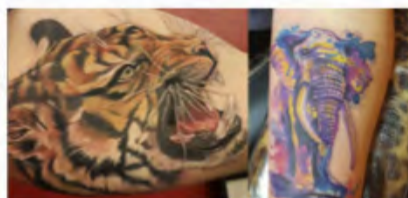
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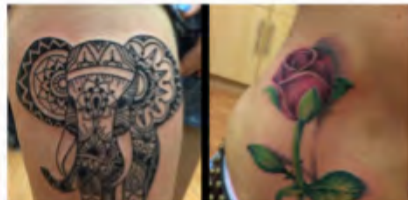
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by Monika Koch



I took this out of the Tattoo Freeze run of pictures/events after figuring it deserved to be bigger having taken Best Colour, Best Of Saturday and Best Of Convention. A real humdinger of a piece in the flesh, it was also neat to see

it go to a (reasonably) local artist too proving yet again that you don't need to get on a plane for awesome... you just have to be paying attention.

I need say no more. This is great work in any world.

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