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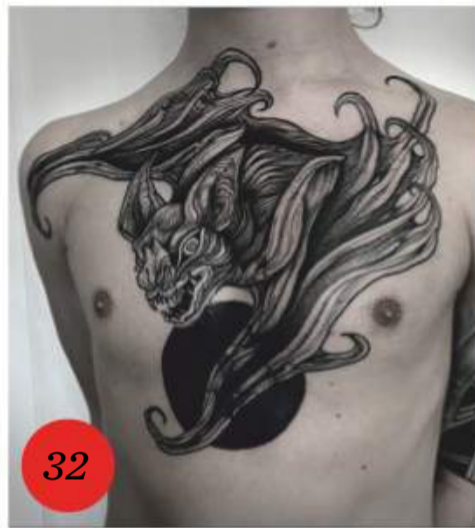
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Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing. This month he meets Australian artist, Tommydoom.

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With the recent passing of Lyle Tuttle, we thought it pertinent to re-run this great interview with him that originally appeared exactly two years back in issue 274. Tattooing will be a far less interesting place without him. Mr Tuttle, we salute you.

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There is a boundless energy charged up in Nomi Chi's tattoos that is hard to contain. A mix of creatures, both of this realm and the next, are caught mid-action, immortalised permanently on the skin by the tattooist's animated linework. Chi's expressive practice punctures the safety of normality, warping well-known animals into exaggerated caricatures of their former selves.

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He's the tattooers' tattooer. For his first ever solo exhibition, Filip Leu decided to show freely inspired sketches of such projects at the Next Door Gallery in Geneva. Titled 'Backpieces', this series of 32 artworks not only offers a variety of his favourite motif, the skull, but also a lesson in tattooing.

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Wayne Simmons continues his

pilgrimage, going deep into the hills to unearth tattoo artists with a penchant for the mystical. This month he meets Argentinian artist, Sara Rosa.

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This month, Sean Herman hits up his buddy Aarón Sánchez and together, they dig deep. If you know anything about the culinary arts, Sánchez's name will be very familiar... then again, as the owner of Daredevil in NYC, that's probably more like it.

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Tattoo Art by Jess Yen



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Jess Yen



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INK SET

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



Sven Groenewald

Message in a Bottle

I try to be a good guy but I keep getting pushed backward and forwards like a plastic bottle that's been washed up on the beach—the kind with an important message inside but somebody didn't screw the lid on properly and water got inside, making the paper wet and turned the message into something nobody can read.

One step forward, two steps back.

It's dawned on me lately, that no matter how hard you try, you really can't help some people... even when it was they who asked in the first place.

Imagine that somebody asks for your help in getting a tattoo—where should they go, what should they get, where on the body should they get it. Those are the three main

NEW TATTOO REVEALED, I LOOKED AT IT WITH MY MOUTH SEWN SHUT BY A PASSING DRAGONFLY...



SION SMITH • EDITOR
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questions... always.

The 'what should I get', I never answer. With the 'where', I tend to dish out advice based on well-known pain charts. But when it comes to advice on which studio to go to, I'm a little more forthcoming. I can point out the good studios I know within a forty mile radius, the killer studios in the big cities, and I can even take you on a global tour if that's what you're into.

So why, after you have asked this (and I'm not for a moment suggesting I am The Au-



SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING

thority on such matters) would you head off to a studio within ten minutes of your house that looks like it closed down three years ago and raise your top to get your stomach tattooed as a first time choice with a portrait of Rihanna that turned out to look more like whatever the name of the horse is that won the Grand National last weekend?

Or actually, any horse that ran the Grand National.

It's kind of funny... but on the other hand it's not. I guess you wouldn't know that you would end up with a horse until it was finished, but there are some good indications on your journey up to this point that might have shown you where the holes in the road might be.

Then again, the world is a weird place, and I know this to be true because when said shirt was raised for the great tattoo reveal later that same week, I was not alone, a friend was with me.

New tattoo revealed, I looked at it with my mouth sewn shut by a passing dragonfly, thinking to myself: *"Jesus wept, that looks sore... and I thought she was getting a tattoo of Rihanna, but that looks like a horse."*

New tattoo revealed, my friend who I was with (who to be fair, has not a whole lot of interest in tattooing but is also not stupid) said: "Hey! It's Rihanna!"

Inside, I am screaming: *"Nope—it's a freaking horse."*

I kept my opinions to myself and again, to be fair, said tattooed person didn't seem to give a damn whether I approved or not. Deep down, she knew it looked like Mr Ed. (look it up) but that's a lot of pain to go through to be disappointed, so you refocus your lens to make it acceptable to yourself, right?

< Cue a Live Aid reference simply because somebody just mentioned it on the TV and I thought: 'I'll use that to wrap this up'. >

I've never set myself up to be some kind of Geldof figure, though I did get mistaken for him once in Manchester. That didn't end well. Nor did I ever say I was some kind of Bono figure because all he does is talk a lot and when he's finished, you're no better off.

I see myself more as an Adam Ant figure. Give it your best shot early on in the day and knowing that it's only rock n roll, go back to



I'VE NEVER SET MYSELF UP TO BE SOME KIND OF GELDOF FIGURE, THOUGH I DID GET MISTAKEN FOR HIM ONCE IN MANCHESTER

your own work—the bit you can control—while other people try to change the world when the world is not really listening.

But you know...she was happy with her Rihanna Horse and maybe that's all that matters. Whether she will be later remains to be seen.

It's not a conversation I much want to be part of. ▣



TATTOOSAFE

TATTOO SUPPLY





Good friends 'till the very end, our tattoos are always there for us

I've been a bit quiet in here recently. Sorry about that—this new tiny shouty human is very much to blame.

Firstly I'm going to say something that lots of people no doubt think but don't feel they can utter out loud... motherhood so far has been a challenge. It's really hard. Like, really hard, and I wasn't prepared for that.

When your life quickly becomes taken over by a relentless routine of feeding, winding, changing, cleaning, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week... there are things you miss from the real world, and things you don't miss. I don't miss silence—I'm happy to have another being here with me. I don't miss anxiety—something which has no place when my mindspace immediately becomes so limited and precious. I do miss sleep. And I do miss tattoos.

I thought it would be a long time before tattoos came back into my life again, something I imagined I simply wouldn't be able to prioritise at such a draining time, but at 4am this morning, they danced right back into my life, like familiar stars in the night sky that you look up to realise we're there all along.

The whole lack of sleep, lack of social interaction, lack of anything non-milk related takes its toll mentally, and last night, after trying to settle my little boy for hours on end, I reached, what I have come to refer to as, little breaking points. These are the times in life when you searching for solutions, look for answers, and wonder how you can continue through the unknown, with any shred of sanity. These are the times when you don't know where to turn. These are the times when some of us, turn to tattoos.

As my ears were starting to numb from the shrill cry of my baby, and I was starting to feel the sense of stress palpitate through my veins, I reached for my phone. I didn't text a friend, I didn't write a rant on social media (OK, maybe just a little one), I didn't search for help from a mums forums... I texted my tattooist.

It felt so good to book my first post-natal tattoo appointment, and by the time I'd done texting him and organising a suitable date, the tiny milk monster next to me was now



Kevin Ray

THESE ARE THE TIMES WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE TO TURN. THESE ARE THE TIMES WHEN SOME OF US, TURN TO TATTOOS.



REBECCA GIVENS

fast asleep, reminding me that my first tattoo for him would of course mark the downs, as well as the ups, like all tattoos do.

This morning, after over a year of not getting tattooed, I was reminded why we do this to ourselves, sometimes at the most difficult times, why we turn to tattoos during tough moments. It's not because they offer a remedy... they're not a medicine, but more like an old friend. Tattoos are there when we need them most, reminding us that life will go on, and they'll help us celebrate it in the best way they can.

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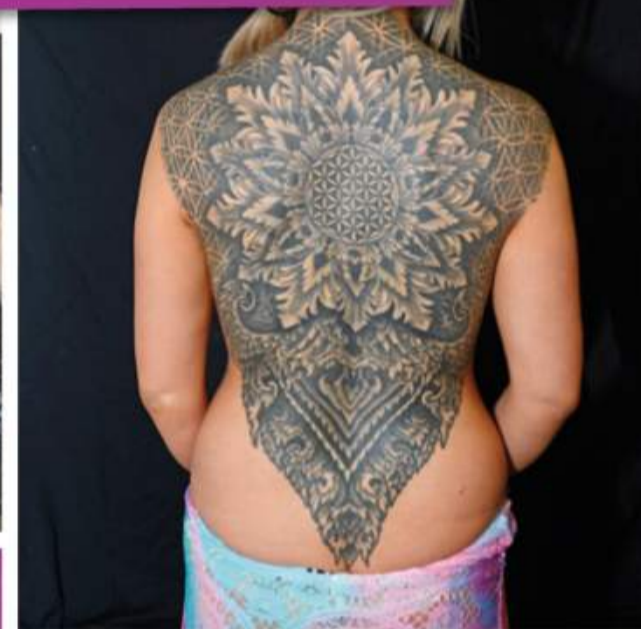
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ROAD TEST

There are a lot of myths, misconceptions and blatant lies floating round the internet when it comes to tattoo aftercare. One of the biggest areas of debate is what the best aftercare product is and what should be avoided. Matt Haddon-Reichardt opted to be a human guinea pig and find out what all the fuss is about

Not caring for a fresh tattoo can have disastrous consequences.

Why wait all that time to get a booking with your dream tattooist and spend all that money just to ruin your new tattoo by not looking after it properly. Good hygiene and a solid aftercare regime will help ensure the tattoo doesn't get infected, ink doesn't drop out and the tattoo heals bright and clear. People can be understandably anxious to get the aftercare routine right and a big part of this is what cream, if any, to use to help heal your tattoo.

Over the past few years dozens of aftercare products have popped up replacing the usual suspects bought from the chemist. I wanted

to put a tattoo aftercare cream up against a standard skin healing cream and also throw a curve ball into the mix.

The 3 products I opted for were Yayo Tattoo Prime, Bepanthen and the dreaded petroleum jelly. But first I needed a tattoo.

Enter Harrogate based artist Guy Fletcher. He normally specialises in realism and portrait work, but today he would be putting three simple black circles on my wrist. An easy day at the office for Guy and now my arm looks like one side of a dice. After the tattoo was applied and the wrap taken off I began a regime of applying Yayo Prime, Bepanthen and petroleum jelly twice daily; one product to each black circle.

I've had some tattooists advise me that tattoos take 2 weeks to heal others 4 weeks so I decided to split the difference and opted for 3. I would follow the regime for 3 weeks and note which circle healed the best

In terms of the products, Yayo Prime is marketed as a speciality cream specifically

IF YOU LOOK AT THE STUDIES YOU CAN SPEED UP WOUND HEALING BY KEEPING THE TATTOO MOIST...



designed to heal your tattoo bright and bold. Bepanthen has long been recommended by tattooists and in its day job it's sold as a nappy rash cream that aids healing. Petroleum jelly is regarded as a no go product as its rumoured to cause ink to leach out of the tattoo. I've always been told that applying petroleum jelly to a fresh tattoo is akin to rubbing it with sandpaper, but still... this is science we're talking about.

While I waited for the experiment to play out, I picked the brains of my dad, Tony, on the best way to heal a tattoo. A former RAF medic, community nurse and first aid trainer he's seen all sorts of cuts, burns and abrasions.

"The role petroleum jelly has in tattooing and attitudes towards it are really contradictory," my dad muses.

"A lot of tattooists will use it as a lubricant when tattooing to reduce friction and allow smooth working and some will even apply a liberal dose at the end before wrapping the tattoo to ensure the tattoo is thoroughly moisturised. Yet when you talk to tattooists about petroleum jelly as an aftercare product it's seen as the devil. I've heard all sorts of stories from it causing the ink to leach out of the skin, to it stopping the ink from settling and that it will bleach out the colour. This advice is coming from the same tattooists who use it when tattooing; bit contradictory to use it when tattooing but ban it during the healing process."

"All this push me/pull you about petroleum jelly is of course nonsense. All you need to do is look at how hard it is to shift a tattoo with laser removal to see that the negative claims against petroleum jelly are false. If it was that good at destroying a tattoo surely you could just tattoo over the old tattoo with petroleum jelly to disrupt the ink and break it up. If it's that good at pulling ink out of the skin why use it as a lubricant and post tattoo moisturiser?"

While old Tony is sceptical about the claims a lot of tattooists make, he is in agreement on one thing, moisturising a tattoo aids healing.

"If you look at the studies you can speed up wound healing by keeping the tattoo moist. It helps prevent the skin drying out and cracking which not only reduces pain it helps guard against infection."

In Tony's experience the biggest factor in tattoo healing is preventing infection.



...IT HELPS PREVENT THE SKIN DRYING OUT AND CRACKING WHICH NOT ONLY REDUCES PAIN IT HELPS GUARD AGAINST INFECTION

Award winning tattooist Guy Fletcher gives his advice on how best to heal a tattoo.

"Leave the covering or dressing on the tattoo until you return home or to a safe and clean environment. Ensure your hands are cleaned thoroughly before and after you apply cream to your tattoo. Wash the tattooed area carefully using clean water and antibacterial soap. Pat the area dry with a fresh clean towel; don't share towels with other people. Once dry apply a small amount of aftercare cream to the tattoo covering it evenly. Repeat this process 2-3 times a day for 10-14 days. Avoid bathing [ie: leaving the tattoo in water for any length of time] or swimming while the tattoo heals." "Follow these guidelines and you should have a fresh healthy tattoo you can enjoy for years to come."



“An infection will mess up a tattoo far more than a blob of petroleum jelly. Keeping the tattoo clean and bacteria free is vital for the design to stay fresh and sharp. Where people go wrong is applying too much moisturising cream clogging up the skin and giving bacteria a foothold. You only need a thin layer; less is more. And you only need to apply it two to three times a day. Always wash your hands thoroughly before you touch the tattoo and always wash the tattoo morning and night. Change clothing, towels and bedding that comes into contact with the tattoo daily. You need to make sure that anything that comes into contact with the tattoo is sterile. Don't share soap, towels or tubs of moisturiser. Skin infections not only ruin your tattoo they can lead to blood poisoning and sepsis which can be fatal.”

Eventually, the three weeks are up and the results are in. And the winner is...

...Yayo Prime!

The 3 circles on my wrist have all healed but the dot that received the regular dose of Yayo Prime healed the quickest. The circle that I applied petroleum jelly to took the longest to lose the redness in the skin surrounding the tattoo and there has been a slight spot of dropout in the centre of the tattoo. The circle I applied Bepanthen to has healed as well as the Yayo Prime circle but the skin around it stayed redder for longer.

CLING FILM IS FOR CATERING NOT FOR TATTOOING

Overall the difference on such a small tattoo is negligible but we only have to extrapolate the results up to show that applying the right type of aftercare cream increases healing time and promotes ink retention.

I also found over the 3 weeks that each product had other pros and cons. Petroleum jelly is cheap and easy to apply but the fact it comes in a tub raises concerns for bacterial contamination of the jelly with double dipping. It also doesn't smell great. Bepanthen comes in a tube which feels more hygienic than a tub. Its coats the tattoo nicely but is a bit sticky and can drag on a fresh tattoo. It also doesn't smell great. Bepanthen did provide the most durable barrier to the tattoo helping to prevent it rubbing on clothing. Its barrier cream properties are what makes it an excellent cream for a nappy clad baby's bum.

Yayo Prime however has a nice texture and is easy to apply. It smells lovely but it also comes in a tub which raises the same contamination issue as the petroleum jelly.

To sum up I turn back to my dad for advice.

“I'm a bit sceptical it was the cream that healed the third circle better. So many other factors are in play like if you caught or rubbed the tattoos. Still the experiment showed a definite difference so who am I to argue. My best advice is use a product that suits your skin. Remember to drink, eat and sleep well. After all your body heals from the inside out”

I ask him what he thinks of covering the tattoo in cling film as a way of healing it.

“Covering a tattoo all day provides a lovely warm, moist environment in which bacteria can thrive. If you have to cover it to protect it from rubbing on clothes or getting contaminated use a bandage or specialist tattoo guard. Cling film is for catering not for tattooing.” □



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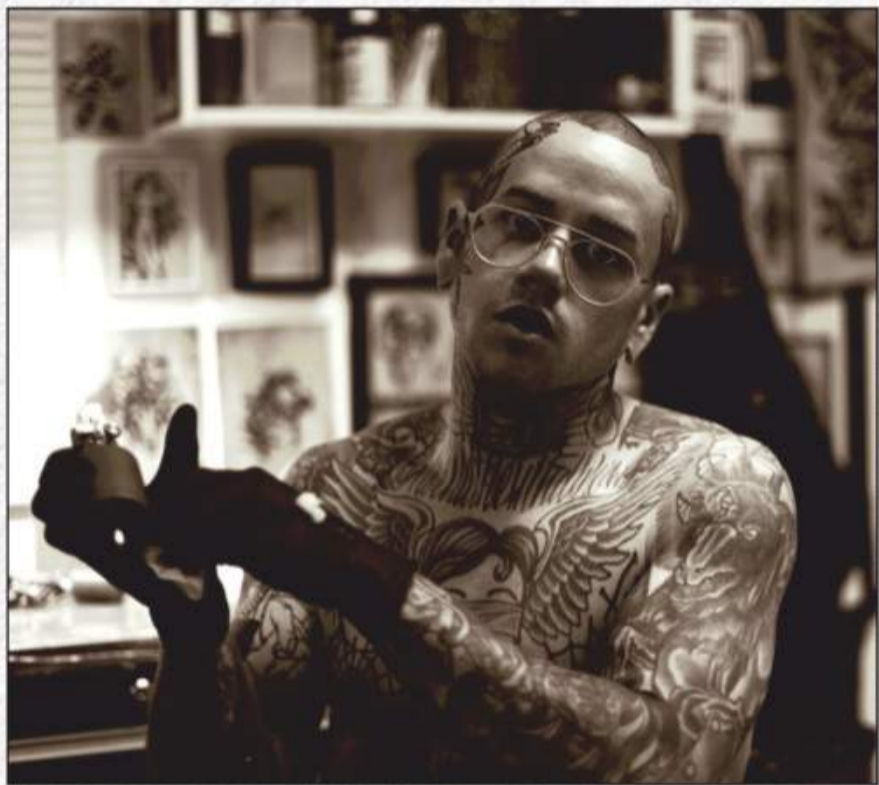
REBEL INC.

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing. This month he meets Australian artist, *Tommydoom*

 tommydoom

Tommydoom is part of the new generation of artists.

Like many reading this, no doubt, he came to tattooing through the boom of around ten to fifteen years ago—I'm talking, of course, about the Miami Inks and the Kat Von Ds showing up on our TV screens and the media frenzy which followed. It awakened something within Tommy and today, working at Mimsy's Trailer Trash Tattoo in Brisbane where he puts out some of the freshest looking trad-inspired tattoos I've seen in quite some time, Tommy finds himself to be something of a tattoo nerd.



I'M OFTEN BLESSED WITH THE TRUST AND FREEDOM TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS ON DESIGN ELEMENTS AND PLACEMENT OF TATTOOS







THE ORIGINAL SHAPE OF THE WEB IS BASED ON A DESIGN BY JAPANESE ARTIST HORI CHYO... CIRCA 1900 IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY. I REALLY LIKE THAT TATTOO

"I love tattooing," he tells me. "I love tattoo history. I collect a lot of memorabilia—tattoo machines and things like that."

Australia, he goes on to say, has an incredibly rich tattoo history. He talks of the many talented artists he knows there, something of which I'm seeing more and more myself—not least the wonderful Danica Morgan whom I interviewed recently for my *As Above, So Below* series. And like Danica, Tommy places a lot of importance



on his clients.

"I'm super lucky to have every client I have," he says. "Many of them have been getting tattooed by me for over half a decade now and despite all of our personal developments and the evolution of the way I draw, things still seem to work out well. I'm often blessed with the trust and freedom to make suggestions on design elements and placement of tattoos. I'm also lucky to have a bunch of clients who themselves have great visions for how they want their tattoos to look and they've taught me just as much with their own ideas as I've taught them with my limited experience."

One of these clients is Jubb who trusts nobody but Tommy to tattoo him—and Tommy's tattooed him a lot.

"It's like having a walking billboard," he laughs. "But yeah, Jubb is a stand out amongst the crew purely because of the amount of coverage we've achieved. And he puts up with me forcing him to pose for a lot of photos."

Another is Jane, a longtime customer of the Mimy's crew in general. She had a knee piece done by Tommy which stood out to me as being an excellent example of how he blends the principles of old school tattooing with his own ideas to create something both unique and authentic feeling.

"The goal with the tattoos we've done so far has been to keep the imagery balanced between strong, sharp, classic looking tattoos while also incorporating an elegant touch," Tommy points out. "Which has kind of been something I've been attempting to include in a lot of my designs of late. I like the idea of finding a nice compromise between the 'tough' and the 'beautiful', for lack of better terms."

That particular tattoo started out with Tommy recommending a web—spider webs being an old school staple



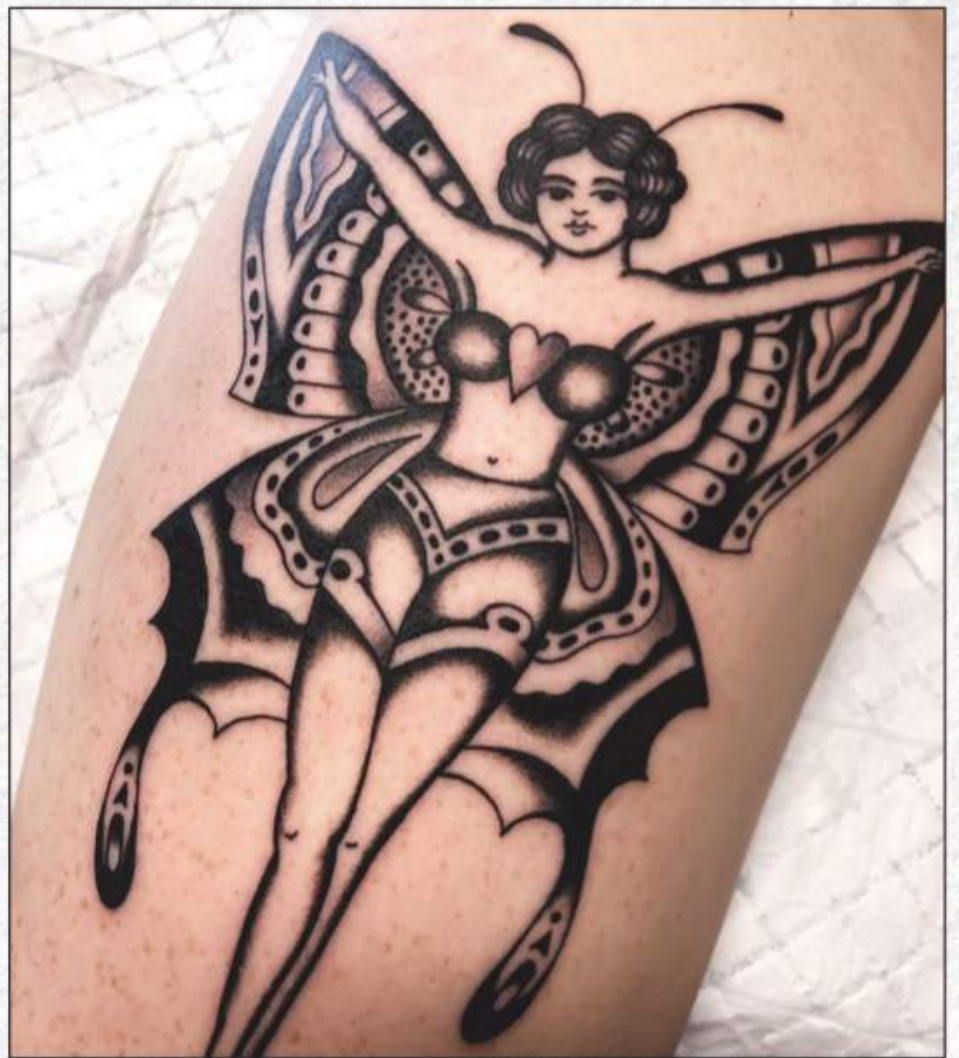
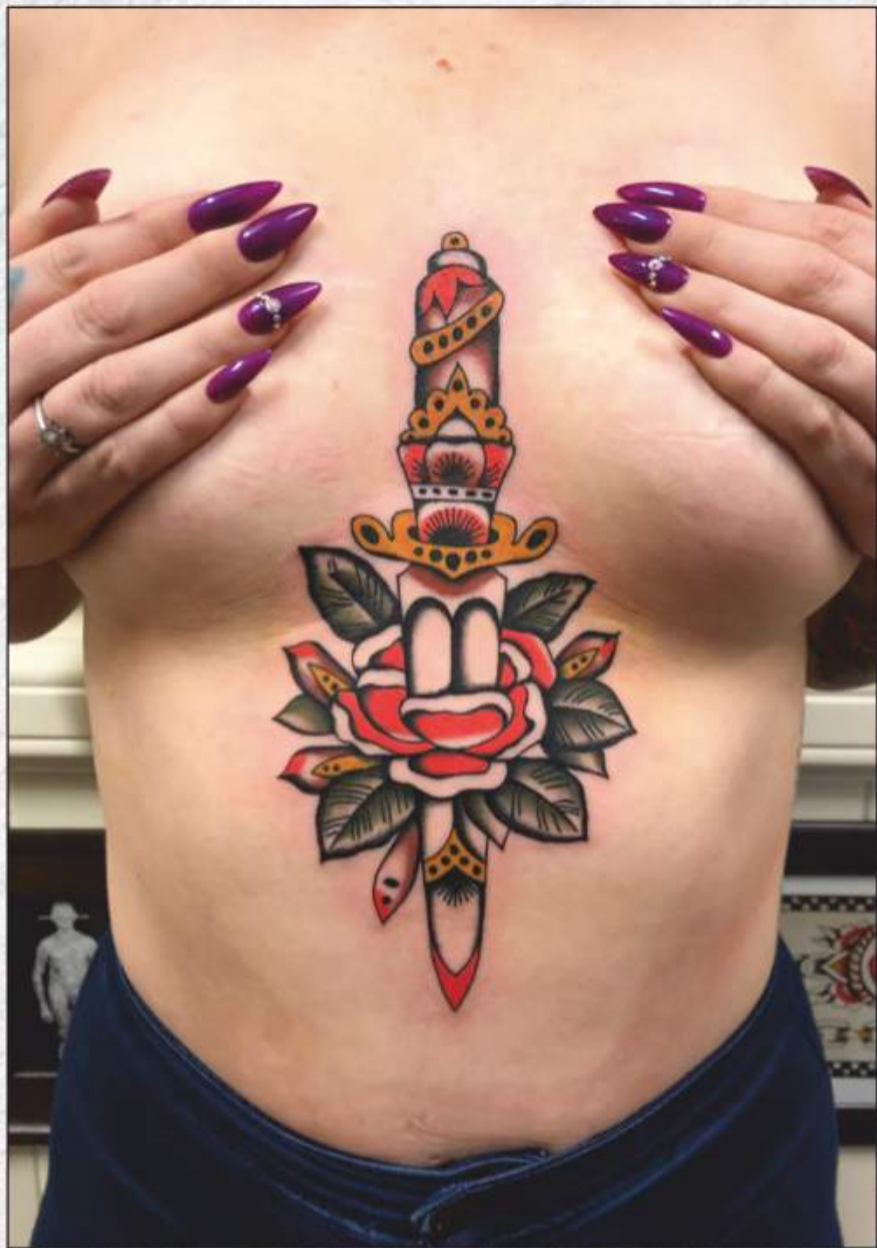


for limbs, such as the knee, which bend a lot. “Actually, the original shape of the web is based on a design by Japanese artist Hori Chyo,” Tommy adds. “Circa 1900 if I remember correctly. I really like that tattoo.”

Placement is a big thing for Tommy in general and something, again, which draws a lot from the old school tradition of tattooing—you could argue that some of the most iconic images within tattooing found their place largely due to how well they work with certain parts of the body.

“It’s something that I’ve just had to experiment with over the years,” Tommy explains, “seeing what kind of different

effects you can create through choosing between multiple placements on the body. I’ve recently become pretty picky about trying to make sure things like stencils of faces are on flatter parts of the body. Or straight images like daggers are on flat long surfaces. I feel like it’s pretty basic stuff but something I want to be assertive with.” The way a tattoo sits, he points out, is every bit as important as its artistic merit. “A beautiful design stuck on at a weird angle, half wrapping over a bone can definitely take away from the tattoo. That being said, I’m all about filling the weird gaps and working with all the body to the best of my ability.”



ANYTHING YOU DO THAT ISN'T A DIRECT TRACING OF A VINTAGE DESIGN IS ESSENTIALLY NOT OLD SCHOOL...

Interestingly, while working within a framework influenced so much by traditional tattooing, Tommy does not see himself as a trad artist so to speak. In fact, he seems quite purist about the whole thing, questioning the validity of an 'old school' tattoo that doesn't follow its lineage to the letter.

"The precedent has been set," he says. "Anything you do that isn't a direct tracing of a vintage design is essentially not old school. It's arguable that we should just leave that stuff alone and stop meddling with it."

What Tommy's doing, then, is something different: taking the ethos of old school tattooing—the simplicity, the clarity, the placements, the colour palette—and running with it to create something of his own. And as before, it's the pragmatism of the whole thing that's most important to the tattoo's success.

"I think the challenge is do something interesting with old principles and references and still get people to resonate with it," he explains. "Anyone can throw a few references together, but you have to get people to be into it."

In a sense, then, does this in itself make Tommy a rebel—to work both within and without the parameters of traditional tattooing? Maybe, maybe not. It hardly matters, really, because, for Tommy, true rebellion comes not from what you do or how it is defined, but rather from refusing to remain stagnant in an art form which, let's face it, can feel quite stagnant at times. There's a lot of peer pressure within tattooing, trends that come and go and artists that move with those trends. But not Tommy.

"Maybe just pushing yourself to improve is rebelling against your comfort zone," he says. "Like, I spent the



whole of 2018 painting in a digital format only—which was a massive step outside the zone for me. I guess it was a successful experiment. I learned a lot about design, even just about how I like my work to be viewed.”

It was during this year that Tommy published his book, ‘STATUE’, a collection featuring some of his tattoos and paintings to date. Having been pushed to the limits creatively, Tommy feels that the whole process has taken his toll on him. “Yeah, 2018 was a bit of an anti-social year for me,” he admits. “But it was productive.”

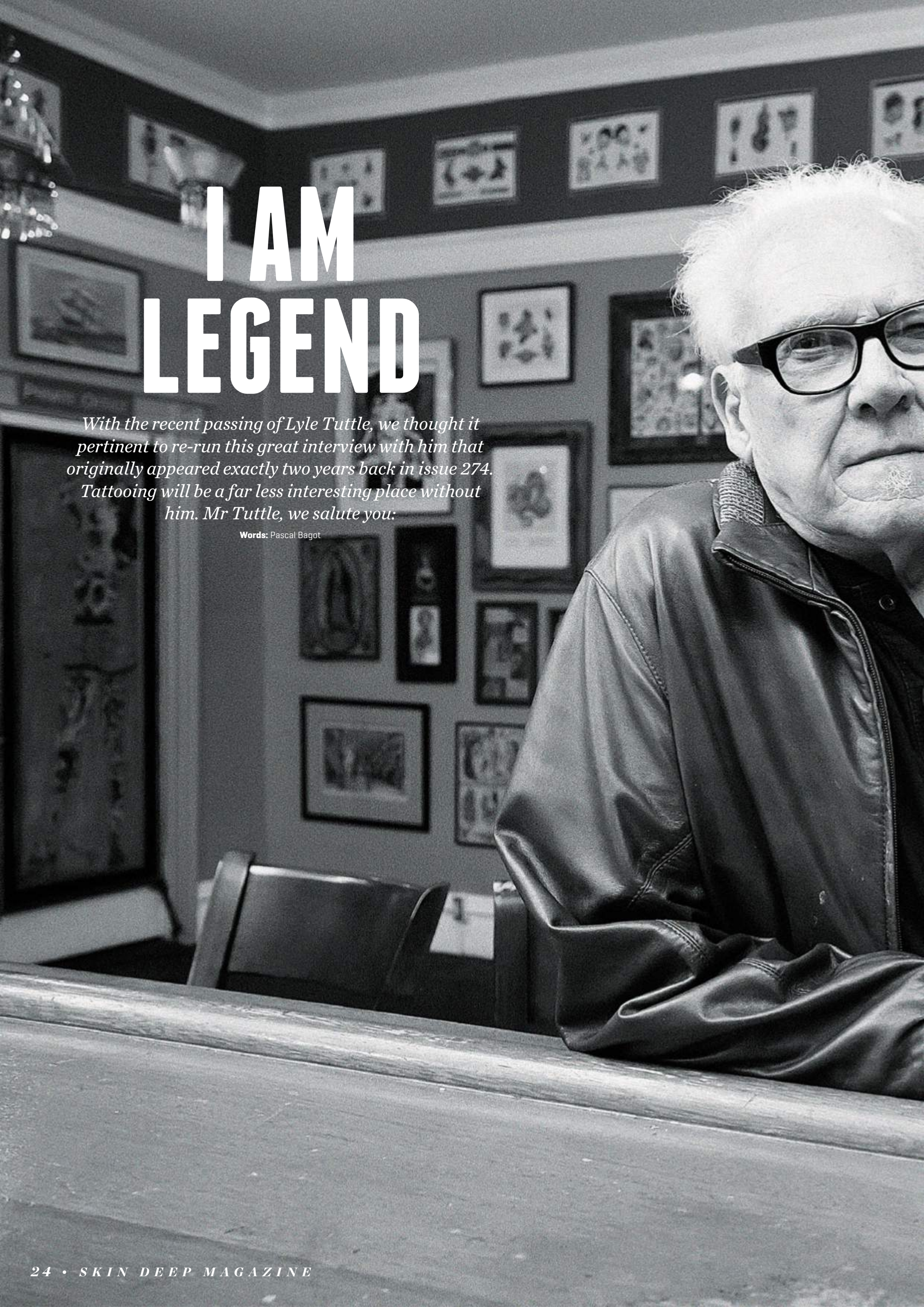
2019, he’s happy to report, is shaping up to be more upbeat. Despite that ever-present urge to evolve—to keep pushing the envelope, to be the best artist he can be—there seems to be something of an inner peace settling

within Tommy. And a large part of that could be down to where he’s at right now quite literally—the people he’s with and how they inspire him.

“Mimsy’s had a great reputation long before I arrived here,” he tells me. “I’m very lucky to have been able to jump in and be provided with a great environment to develop so much over the time I’ve spent here. We’ve got a great crew.”

Being somewhere that feels like home has perhaps given Tommy permission to settle, to find himself in the way he needs to.

“I love tattooing,” he tells me. “I love painting possibly even more. And right now, I’m just excited to do cool paintings and tattoo people.” ▣



I AM LEGEND

With the recent passing of Lyle Tuttle, we thought it pertinent to re-run this great interview with him that originally appeared exactly two years back in issue 274. Tattooing will be a far less interesting place without him. Mr Tuttle, we salute you:

Words: Pascal Bagot



At 84 years old, Lyle Tuttle is not only a legend, he's a true living legend with vitality, an unquestionable thirst for life and tequila with grapefruit. Apart from being a great storyteller, Lyle is also a tireless traveler, always between two planes since he retired from tattooing. He is now solicited from the four corners of the US to give lessons or seminars at tattoo conventions, where he's always keen to talk about the roots of his unbelievable success.

Lyle Tuttle was 'the right person at the right place, at the right time' as he himself likes to say. It's almost like he still can't believe the luck that fell into his lap during the period in the 60's when a lot of social changes happened in California.

San Francisco was the centre of the hippie counter-culture and where, in a puritan American society, sexual liberation happened. Women freed themselves up and tattooing became the symbol of an unconditional freedom people wanted to claim.

At that time, Lyle Tuttle was one of the few active tattooers in town and regardless of the fact that he was not the most skilled, or that he swore like a trooper, he was in big demand – especially by women. They not only came from all over the country to see him, they also brought it up in the media and propelled him to stardom. In the conservative world of tattooing at that time, this unprecedented exposure brought Lyle some hostility... not least from another legend of American tattooing, Sailor Jerry.

WOMEN STARTED TO GET LITTLE TATTOOS, LIKE BUTTERFLIES AND ROSEBUDS. THAT'S ABOUT ALL I TATTOOED FOR MAYBE 4-5 YEARS

When did women started getting tattooed ?

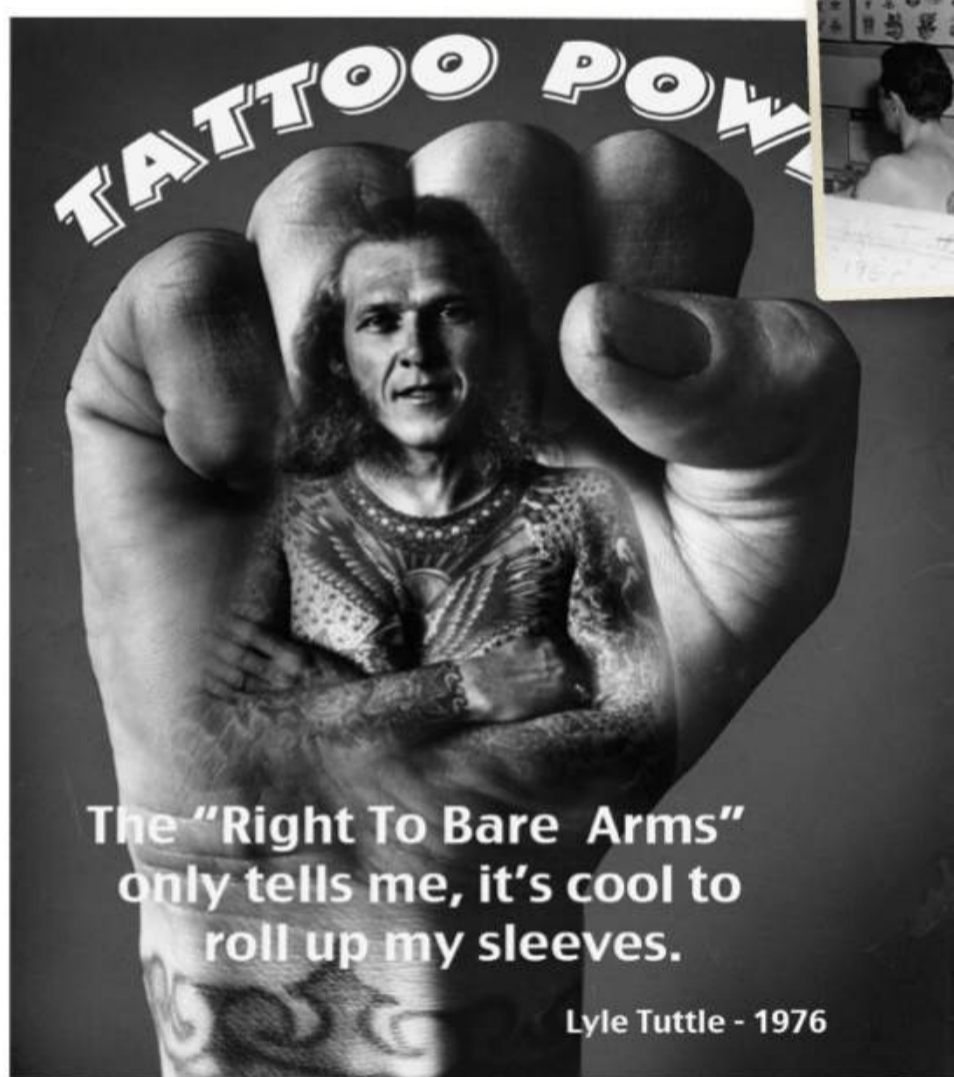
Tattooing, up until the 'women's liberation' came in, around 1965-66 something like that, was a masculine thing. When they were starting to get their rights, they wanted it right now. Getting tattooed was making a statement. All of a sudden, the other half of the human race was opened up to our service. And there were so few tattoo artists... goddam!

Now, everybody's grandmother is a tattoo artist but I was the only shop here in town for 20 years and now there's over 50 or 75 in the phone book. I was in everybody's favourite city, I'm tattooed all over, I'm media friendly... what a fucking perfect combination for success!

Women started to get little tattoos, like butterflies and rosebuds. That's about all I tattooed for maybe 4-5 years. The joke was, I would tattoo a man but they had to be vouched for by a woman. I like tattoos and I like women. Actually I love women, I think they're the greatest thing in the world. It all started with my first tattoo, this one right here (he shows his tattoo, a heart with a ru-ban and 'mother' written on it).

Who was getting tattooed before the 60's ?

It was the military, the best customers in the world. They get paid on the 1st and on the 15th through the month and then spend their money in about 5 days. After that, you would have several days off and then you would get paid again as they would come back to you. They were not like the criminal element, they all came from good





stock. Then it winds up that you tattooed civilians, young guys that were full of piss and vinegar, red blooded American boys. Very rarely a woman. Because if a woman got tattooed she was generally talked into it by a man – ‘Get my name on you, honey’.

How comfortable was it for women to come and see you, to be tattooed by a man?

A woman can feel she’s endangered by somebody. I guess they just picked up that there wasn’t any danger! I was just picking a picture from the wall and I’ve never made a pass at them. I had women say: ‘I bet you get a lot of passes made at you?’ And my answer was ‘Yes, thank you’. That’s not dangerous.

Some people have told me I can tell the dirtiest fucking jokes in the

I’M NOT A SMART BUSINESSMAN AT ALL, BUT LOOK, MY ADVICE TO ANYBODY IS ‘WORK HARD, DO THE BEST THAT YOU CAN, SAVE YOUR MONEY AND BUY REAL ESTATE’

world but they don’t sound dirty when I tell them. But there are some guys who can tell an off-colour joke and make it sound filthy.

So, I got a fucking nice personality or a nice nature and they were entirely comfortable. I had women flying in from all over the United States to get tattooed by me.

How come?

Because of the press. Between 1965 and 1975 that was my ‘time’. I’m not a smart businessman at all, but look, my advice to anybody is ‘Work hard, do the best that you can, save your money and buy real estate’.

In October 1970 you were on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine and from there you became a star. How did it happen?

I call it the fucking Stairway To Heaven! There was a young lady, cute young lady, who came in one night. She wanted a ring tattooed around her finger. I fucking tried to talk her out of it but she really wanted it, so I did it for her. If you didn’t like her tattoo, she would show it this way (Lyle shows me the finger). So then she’s looking around in my tattoo shop and I was always interested in image. I had the place looking like a fucking doctor’s office. And she’s looking around and she says: ‘You know this is the age of Aquarius. It’s the coming of a new age and you should loosen this place up. The work area may look like a doctor’s office but the rest of the decor don’t have to look like it’. I reply: ‘What do you think I should make it look like?’ She thought for about a million minutes and answered: ‘Jesus, how about a Victorian whorehouse?’ She turned around and added: ‘You know there’s a story here?’ And I go: ‘A story huh? Are you a writer?’ She says ‘Yes’ ‘Who are you writing for?’ I ask. ‘Rolling Stone magazine.’ It was Amie Hill and she wrote a fucking article about me. When she went to school, her roommate was a woman who happened to become a journalist later and went on to write a fucking article about me in Life Magazine in 1972.

You got a lot of attention too for tattooing Janis Joplin, can



you tell us about it?

When the Haight Hashbury—the general headquarter for the hippie movement in San Francisco—was going on, I was so busy with all the hippies downtown, that I was now in that fucking scene. I was a hippie too I guess. My kids took acid before I did, but I took a bunch after! I was watching television one night. I'm not a music fan, I don't like fucking music. In the fucking 60's and the 70's rock'n'roll was fucking decent music—the Eagles, the Beatles, but this cock-sucking stuff they play today...

So, I heard about Janis Joplin, even though I didn't care that much for her music. Janis was a nice person and she had just got back from South-America. This was in 1970. I just started getting my first big publicity. I'm up in my tattoo shop, on the second floor, here come two big fucking Samoyed hairy dogs to the door and here's this fucking girl behind them. She's got those bolos wrapped under her fucking neck. That was Janis. She'd read the article in the San Jose paper with pictures of me and she sort of fell in love with the fucking image or something, and thought: 'Well, I want to get a tattoo'.

I was the only game in town and she got two tattoos

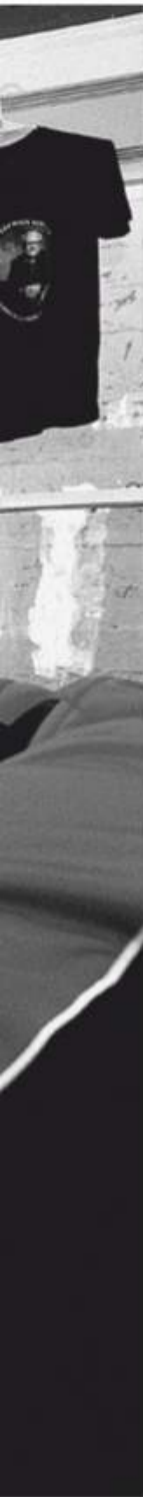
I'M UP IN MY TATTOO SHOP, ON THE SECOND FLOOR, HERE COME TWO BIG SAMOYED HAIRY DOGS TO THE DOOR AND HERE'S THIS GIRL BEHIND THEM...

that night. A heart on the breast and a bracelet. She wanted to get the heart first, which is a little fucking thing. Now, being a wise tattoo artist you always put the big tattoo on first because when they get the little one, that motherfucker's gonna hurt and they won't get another one! I put the bracelet on first, then her and I became fast friends. She was in my house that afternoon of the day that she died. I lived over in Sausalito, up on the hill. She caught a helicopter, shuttle helicopter, went to Los Angeles and died there. People often ask me 'Did you fuck Janis Joplin?' No, I didn't. Because she was not fucking attractive. I go by pheromones.

ternoon of the day that she died. I lived over in Sausalito, up on the hill. She caught a helicopter, shuttle helicopter, went to Los Angeles and died there. People often ask me 'Did you fuck Janis Joplin?' No, I didn't. Because she was not fucking attractive. I go by pheromones.

What impact did she have on the popularisation of tattooing among women?

She did more for tattooing probably than anybody because she would announce to audiences that anybody who got tattooed liked to fuck a lot. So the village idiots went like: 'Blablablablabla... oh I like to fuck a lot. I need a tattoo!' I help Janis Joplin's fans out when they contact me though. When I went to my shop two days after Janis died, there was a young lady there waiting at the door for



a little heart on her breast. We went upstairs and I put it on. I may have put a thousand on ever since. I'm sure Janis would love that because she liked the entourage, she loved the attention. She was a nice person. Keep her memory alive.

How was it to work with a feminine clientele after tattooing so many men?

I liked to do small and colourful tattoos—big tattoos are not feminine. Guys like to get big motherfuckers and shit like that and they stink like a Harley wheel. Women smell nice, they have nice conversation, they're fucking human beings. Why wouldn't I gravitate towards them? I've been accused more than once by women, they thought I was gay because I liked women so much. I thought: 'You motherfuckers...'. It doesn't have anything to do with it. I just like them.

Women made tattooing a kinder and gentler art. One time, there was a woman coming in my studio and she had like a business suit on, I mean fucking class. She had a pair of panties on that probably cost a hundred dollars, they had lace and everything on them. I said: 'I don't want to take the responsibility I might get some ink on these panties'. She crossed the room—well it

WOMEN MADE TATTOOING A KINDER AND GENTLER ART

was a small room where I did my private appointments—and she came back across the fucking room and she stripped from the fucking waste down, panties in her hands and she

flips them over her fucking shoulder!

God, those were great days you know.

Did you tattoo the photographer Annie Leibovitz?

No, she's Jewish. I'm honorary Jewish. The last time I got married – I've been married three times—I got married by a Rabbi. Neither one of us was fucking Jewish. I'm not anti-semitic at all, I hate everybody equally.

That doesn't sounds really like a hippie message with love for every one...

I get along with everybody, I try to get along with everybody. You don't start conversations off with: 'Hey asshole!' If you don't have friends and fans, you're nothing. I like generally to get along with people. But I'm a fucking missing drop. You know what a missing drop is? It's a hater of the human race. I hate the human race, we're the worst fucking animal that ever walked the face of the earth. We're not dealing with individuals now, I'm summarising the whole fucking human race. We're lower



than rats. And God made men in his own image. That boy fucked up! That's a fucked up boy!

You said 'I only tattoo women if their mother were tattooed', what did you mean about that?

Well, we're all solo operators and we all have our own restrictions. I don't tattoo hands, face, feet, neck. I don't have any. So if it's not good enough for me it's not good enough for you. Plus, to be a tattooer you got to have a conscience. I'd fuck you up. I could write on your forehead: 'The flags are rag, the bibles are books, mothers are head and God's a crook'. You know, fuck you up for your whole life, but I'm not that hungry, to do that. I would say 'Go out in the fucking street and you'll find a champ that will do it to you, but I'm not having it on my conscience'.

I would just feel better with myself. You have to love yourself. My service, that I dispense, lasts you a lifetime. For the rest of your life, you're gonna have that son of a bitch on there. You have to have a conscience. Is the mon-

I DON'T TATTOO HANDS, FACE, FEET, NECK. I DON'T HAVE ANY. SO IF IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU

etary gain worth what you are doing to the person? When I was hungry you might get fucking an American flag across your fucking forehead, but I haven't been that hungry.

You said also: 'Tattoos aren't meant for everybody, they are too fucking good for most people'.

Getting a tattoo is the most personal, selfish thing that you can do for yourself. You can't hock it, taking it to a pawn shop and get money for it. You're buying it, it's strictly a personal gift. They're stickers on your luggage to me, but tattoos are good for you too. They let you know who you are. One day, you might wake up in the morning with a fucking note on the pillow telling you 'I'm leaving'. You put your foot out of the bed and your fucking dog bites you, then you go outside or you look out the window and your fucking car is gone. You sit down and you make a cup of coffee, you don't have any cream or sugar, then you pick up the newspaper and all your stock is down. 'Ok, I don't know who the fuck I am!' Tattoos are a good statement for identity. □

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UNBOUND CREATURES

There is a boundless energy charged up in Nomi Chi's tattoos that is hard to contain. A mix of creatures, both of this realm and the next, are caught mid-action, immortalised permanently on the skin by the tattooist's animated linework. Chi's expressive practice punctures the safety of normality, warping well-known animals into exaggerated caricatures of their former selves.

@lizard_milk

These highly stylised beings seem as though they have been transposed straight from the pages of a graphic novel; having left the rigidity of enclosed, rectangular panels to the open plains of the body's living surface. The tattooist allows such creatures to breathe freely, unburdened by the limitations of the illustrated and printed page, now continuing their stories on any willing recipient...

Your close affiliation to nature and the animal kingdom is evident in your work, what drew you to tattooing the natural world?

This is really context-specific: I grew up a pretty introverted and nerdy kid. The study of nature and animals (in documentaries, with toys and picture books) were the focus of my attention, and, along with drawing, provided me with respite from the confusing world of other kids and people. For a long time I wanted to be a biologist! This was also encouraged by my parents, my dad especially was and still is an avid outdoorsman who does not fear death and took me on many a misadventure when I was tiny. This thread obviously carried into my adult life, and it turns out that I am a much more patient and committed artist rather than scientist, but I still hold inklings of those formative dreams and interests in my tattoo practice.

Are you inspired directly by nature? Or, do you look to art styles to create your ideas?

My current stylistic approach borrows a lot more from folk art, and other heavily-stylised interpretations of the creatures I am drawing, rather than illustrators

EACH TATTOO IS LIKE IT'S OWN LIVING INSTALLATION, AND THEY'RE NEVER QUITE THE SAME FROM YEAR TO YEAR





working within realism/naturalism. I try to pull from a lot of sources to avoid appropriation — for one example, I love medieval illustrations of animals which look like the artists were working from sparse, drunk verbal descriptions as source material. There's just much more inspiration for me in caricature, exaggerations and far-fetched interpretation. However, some of my favourite places in the world are natural history museums with impressive taxidermy collections, and I sometimes go to them to draw, but it's debatable whether or not, like, repositories of stuffed dead animals necessarily count as nature.

What other tattooists do you admire that work within similar themes of the natural world?

Stephanie Brown (@feralcatbox) does some really phenomenal colour work; she's like the Walton Ford or John James Audubon of tattooing. Stephanie is particularly adept at snakes, birds and guts: all things which are exciting to me and should be exciting to everyone, really. Beyon (@beyon.wren.moor) and her wife Noel'le Longhaul (@laughingloone) have beautiful illustrative styles, Beyon's being more reductive and minimal - her animals are so lovely and distinct and I love the way she toys with



the placement of her designs. Noel'le leans heavily into maximalism and intense coverage - she and I have been doing some collaborations lately, too. I recently found out about Adam Ponto (@gay.famous) and I'm such a huge sucker for their extremely adorable snarly critters.

Your tattoos are illustrative in style, what led you to create work in this way?

I'M ALSO KEEN ON SHAPESHIFTERS AND MYTHICAL FIGURES THAT BEND THROUGH AND AROUND DIFFERENT WORLDS



I have an illustration and gallery art practice that predates, and was developed in tandem with, my tattoo career. Having a short attention span and inability to focus means that I need to be constantly making things with different materials, and it is interesting to see how different modes of working (not all visual!) interact with each other. There is a lot of intentional and unintentional cross-pollination between all of the different parts of my art-brain, I actually initially wanted to keep my illustration and tattoo practice wholly separate and compartmentalised, but they seem to be in constant dialogue in a way that is almost not quite in my control.

What can be achieved in a tattoo that can't be achieved by an illustration on paper?

Making an extremely direct, personal and private impact on the way a person experiences living in their own body is, I would say, particular to tattooing (and body modification by proxy). In that same vein, tattoos arguably can't be replicated like a print (although there's a lot of shared griping about design theft), they can't easily be bought from their original patron and redistributed, so tattoos

don't participate in the art market and art-objectness the way 2D art might be able to. In spite of our best efforts via social media et al, there's really no replicating the experience of encountering a particular piece made by a particular artist on a particular person in real life, as tattoos are inherently bodied experiences. Each tattoo is like it's own living installation, and they're never quite the same from year to year as they decay and age with the host on which they are made. Also, stippling is a lot faster and easier with a tattoo machine rather than an analogue pen.



Each tattooed creature seems to have its own unique personality, a life of its own with its individual history and backstory, is it important that tattoos contain this type of thematic depth?

I like to work with a lot of implied narrative drama, and interaction between figures and tension as a vague concept. I'm heavily influenced by graphic novels, cartoons and picture books so the idea of movement and sequence bleed into my tattoo work quite freely, and there's a lot of important elements in that which I strive towards. However I admire a lot of tattoo work that can operate well outside of this particular framework, I don't necessarily think it is important for all or even most tattoos.

Some of your tattoos combine both animal and human features; does surrealism have an affect on your working practices?

My combining of human and animal features in tattoo designs is much less to do with surrealism and more to do with my thinking around mythology, and consideration

in regards to gender and bodies as a whole. Historical and contemporary concepts of women or 'feminized figures' being portrayed as monstrous or antagonistic are really interesting cultural moments for me! I'm also keen

on shapeshifters and mythical figures that bend through and around different worlds, as these narratives echo my experiences with gender. I think in this particularly unsightly epoch a lot of folks are feeling succinctly monstrous, antagonised and unwelcome in their own bodies, and it's been healing and cathartic to process that experience with fellow freaks via my imagery.

There is a fluid dimension to the work, each tattoo confidently slithers and slides down the body, why is it important that a tattoo has this dynamism?

The body is constantly in motion, it is an alive, 3D surface, and it's important to me for my tattoo designs to acknowledge this. From my perspective, my tattoo work functions best when it is impactful and potent from a lot of different angles, and while my clients go about their daily lives doing whatever human things they do! I have a background interest in animation and actually used to want to be an animator a few lifetimes ago, so the idea of fluidity and movement follows me, in many forms, into all of my imagery.



Your tattoos utilise fluid lines and abstract shapes to gradually build up textures and bodily features in your creatures, how do you go about creating work in this manner?

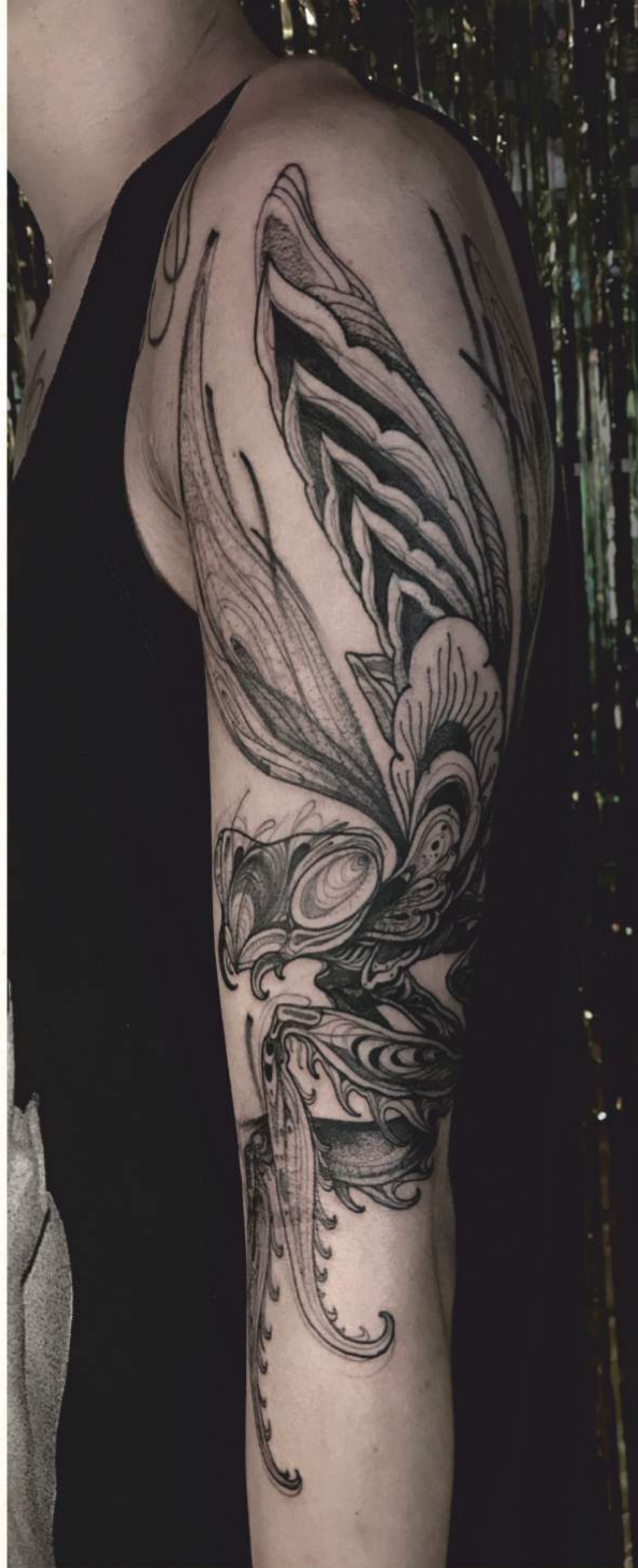
I used to work in a tattoo style which resembled loose pencil sketches, in which I'd try to break down the subject(s) I'm drawing into basic shapes which corresponded to muscle groupings or bone structures, centre-lines for movement and so on. My current style is a result of my taking that basic intention and running with it into a space where everything is a bit tighter and more contained. I'm still usually building shapes in response to anatomical structures like ribs or muscles, but I'm also thinking about my tattoo designs as if they were moving paper puppets.

What specific tattoo techniques do you use in your work?

I am endlessly hunting for the pointiest, most tightly grouped and reliable 3-liner for which to flay my poor sweet clients. Stippling ovetop of whipshading is something I've been doing a lot of, and if I'm feeling feisty I'll throw in some mag drags. I also use a pen type machine because they're good for my weak hands and I'm the kind of guy who can't resist a reliable, hard-working phallic object, you know?

Is there a reason why you use a limited amount of colour in your oeuvre?

Theres a catch-22 here: colour work is not asked of me, so there's less of it, and there's less of it because it's not asked of me. I'm actually quite comfortable working with a nice muted palette. However, I don't think colour elevates my work very often, and if it's not adding dimensionali-



THE BODY IS CONSTANTLY IN MOTION, IT IS AN ALIVE, 3D SURFACE, AND IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME FOR MY TATTOO DESIGNS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS



There is a conscious element of detailed dots and lines that form many of your tattoos, how do these abstract components become intertwined with your complex creature work?

It's a soothing and meditative experience to me, the tattooer, to build a tattoo design with lots of smaller meticulous marks! It's especially pleasing to explore and experiment with marks that are specific to tattooing, like that fat chiselled-marker mag-drag, that moment when a thin line dissolves into stipples because that's how the tattooer's hand moves, and so on. Currently I have my focus on animal-specific textures (scales, fur, feathers) and how I can play with these in patterning and tonal value. Mostly there is a desire to explore the subversion of aesthetic expectations while still striving to end up with a readable image that isn't just grey mush.

What do you think compels your clients to be tattooed with elements from the natural world?

I think there is a lot of evocative and storied potential in

STIPPLING OVERTOP OF WHIPSHADING IS SOMETHING I'VE BEEN DOING A LOT OF, AND IF I'M FEELING FEISTY I'LL THROW IN SOME MAG DRAGS



symbols and images from nature and the natural world. People have been assigning deep-set cultural narratives to non-urban spaces and living things since the birth of language, that's not just going to go away because we have microwaves and pants and stuff.

What subject matter is currently inspiring you?

Angry animals with lots of teeth, scaly things, chimaeras, mythologies that fall outside of Western narrative frameworks, really specific and weird-looking animals, queer themes, large scale work, collaborations.

What does tattooing mean to you?

If it wasn't for my tattoo practice, it's highly likely that I would be some kind of studio-bound hermit living in the middle of a dark bog somewhere, unable to speak or understand language or basic social cues, making art out of tree bark and squished insects (a lifestyle that still calls to me on a cellular level). Tattooing helped guide me, from an extremely anxious child, into being something that resembles a whole entire human being, and for that I am thankful to all of my clients and contemporaries. ▣

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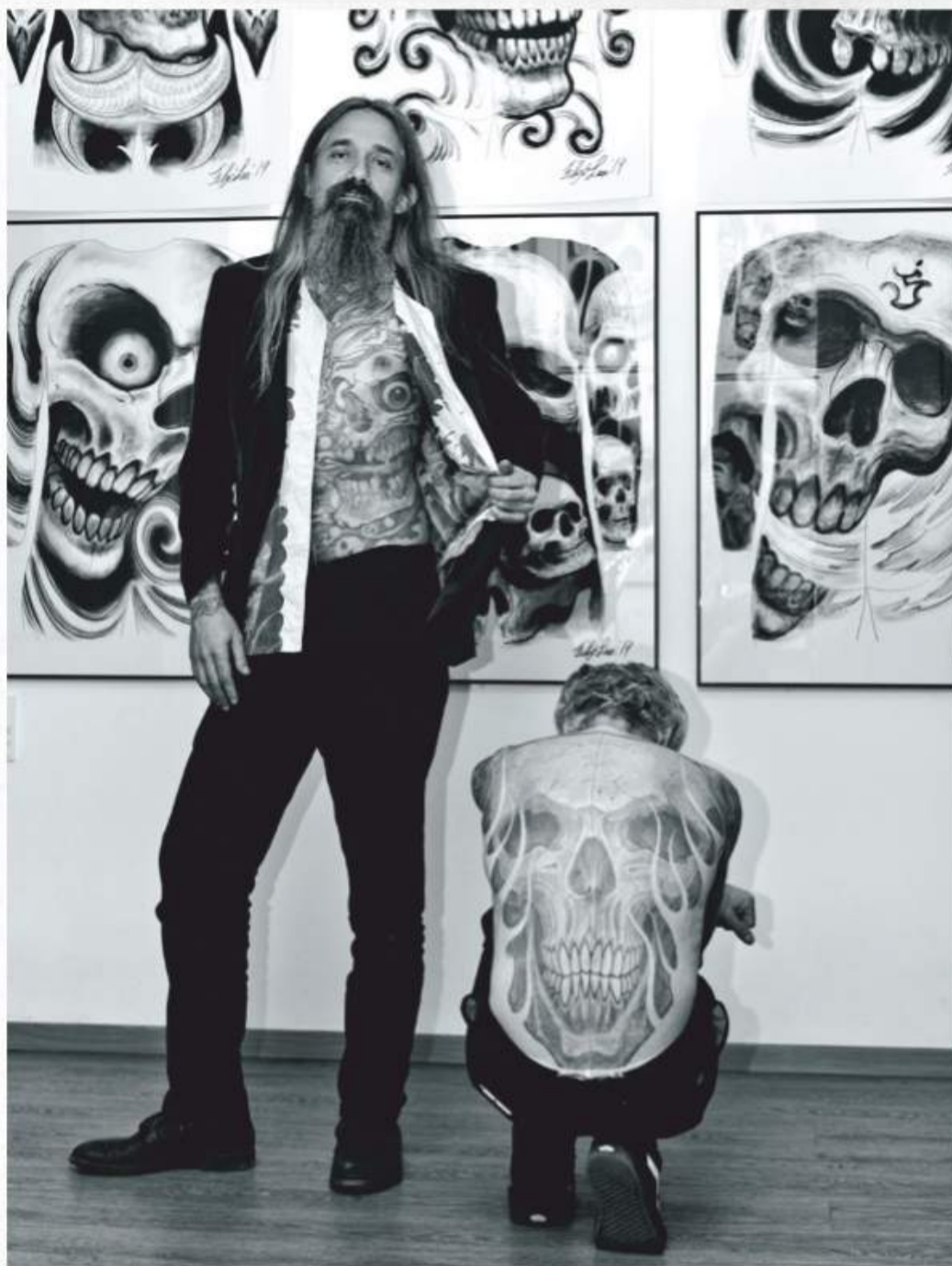
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TATTOOERS: TAVASHERS.

FILIP LEU



He's the tattooers' tattooer. When his customers come from the four corners of the world to see him, in his studio of Sainte-Croix in Switzerland, they usually get big pieces which might turn later into whole bodysuits. For his first ever solo exhibition, Filip Leu decided to show freely inspired sketches of such projects at the Next Door Gallery in Geneva. Titled 'Backpieces', this series of 32 artworks not only offers a variety of his favourite motif, the skull, but also a lesson in tattooing

next-door.ch · leufamilyiron.com

Words and photos : Pascal Bagot - @pascalbagot





This is your first solo exhibition, why have you waited so long?

At the times in the past that I was asked to do one, I just wasn't ready for it, or I didn't have the time. Tattooing takes a lot of my time and energy. I had to take a month off from tattooing just to prepare for this show and be able to concentrate on these drawings. It's sometimes difficult to find the time. I have a full life as an artist, a tattoo artist, a husband and a son.

What made you go for it?

Because I knew Claude (*Morabito, owner of the gallery, created in 2013, and the tattoo studio associated—2017—with Giovanni Guida and Javier Varela, nldr*). I've known him for many years. Funnily enough, I did his back piece with a huge skull a long time ago. While he was getting tattooed by me, Claude actually saw the charcoal designs that I had done way back on the walls of my studio. When we talked about what I could present for this show, I said I'd like to do charcoal bodysuits again. We had a good feeling between us and I trusted him to organise a good show.

You're not presented in the gallery as a tattooer but as an artist for this show. But the format—human size, the frame, the shape of the

body, of the artworks—are related to tattooing. Is it important to confirm you're an artist before being a tattooer?

Well, in English you say either 'tattooist' or 'tattoo artist'. This was a distinction my father, Felix, made to me right from the start. A tattooist is somebody that is very good at his trade, more like a craftsman. But he has a set group of designs on the wall and if you want an eagle, it's 'Eagle N°14 or N°15' etc. You choose it off the flash sheet, no changes, no special orders. A tattoo *artist* is somebody who creates for the individual. And that's always been the way I've worked, from the beginning. I was drawing custom designs for people, to their requests. There's an artistic side to this and I see it going hand in hand with tattooing. But, for quite a while now, I try and present myself as being part of one more category, that of an artist, separate to tattooing. Because tattooing, it's an easy one... it's popular and more generally accepted than ever before. I'm 51 now and I've been tattooing 36 years. I know that I'm gonna slow down eventually. Art is a good avenue for me to follow.

How should these sketches be seen? Preparatory projects? Entertainment?

The more you know, the less you know what to do, right?

It's me playing with different aspects of one thing. I limit myself to a subject. My dad told me about a way to teach yourself, and it applies to anything: break it down, and then work on it piece by piece. I made a book with Luke (Atkinson) on dragon claws, I drew a claw over 2000 times. I could have drawn different ones but I limited myself to just one type. This was putting this idea into practice. These sketches could all be tattooed, of



course. If needed, I could easily re-draw and refine them for a tattoo.

Practicing backpiece sketches like this is something that comes from far away...

I think the first time I did these body designs was in the early 90's. My father, Felix, started me on the idea. I had stopped tattooing for a year and was living in Spain with my wife Titine and I had more time to devote to my artwork. As an exercise to keep my hand in, Felix suggested I do one

Simple is the opposite of easy. Minimalist work is really difficult

drawing of a back piece in charcoal a day. Actually, even before that, he was teaching me how to work on the human body, to be able to draw in a large scale. It's a very different thing to when you work on paper and a table. To work on a real life-size design, you stand up and you draw at arms' length; it's more about the composition, less about the details. I started doing this more and

more often when working on a large body pieces.

Why?

Because the more you know, the less you know what to do, right? The more you understand the mistakes, and the pitfalls... I told you I did a book with 2026 dragon feet; I sit down today to draw a dragon foot and I'm stuck with



the problem of which one to do. It's too much choice. I'm actually looking for very simple. That's why I like these skulls. Charcoal, it's pretty loose. I draw with my finger, I put charcoal on it, I sketch, I smooth it all up by hand. It's very 'brut', just simple. Simple is the opposite of easy. Minimalist work is really difficult. You've got to make it look good with a minimum of stuff. And charcoal is more based upon the idea, less upon the execution, you don't get lost in the details. This is just basics. It's really good to get back to it regularly as an artist. That's also one of the reasons why I don't mind sharing

information with others about tattooing, because talking about it helps me to remember: simplicity.

Is it a way to remember that a good tattoo is first of all, a good idea?

Yes. I like this American quote: "*You can't polish a turd*". If the basic design, the basic construction, is not right, you can put all the effects that you want in it but it'll never look right. Flow, contrast, placement, balance... these are some of the rules that apply to any art, but I think contrast is one of the harder things to achieve in tattooing. Because sometimes you see

tattoos but you can't really see what it is the people have on them. There's a lack of contrast. This is what I was practicing to achieve here. I can't do it any simpler: lay the design down, with the possible faults and the little things that are not worked out, because that is not important yet, it's just the basic idea that counts. You've got to get the idea and the construction down right away. That's what the charcoal taught me and what my father wanted me to understand. We all sometimes get crazy in the beginning of creating a design and hung up about the details, the bling-bling side of it. But the bling is nothing without a good base.

Why did you choose the skull as a motif for these back pieces?

I like them. For me, it's all in the proverb: "*What you are, I was; what I am, you will be*". It's a reminder of life.

I started out with the little stuff and I worked my way up to the big pieces. It's been a long, long road, to get to the big work



This connection between tattooing and death comes very early in your career. You were only 10 years old when you asked your father to tattoo you and he didn't want to until you gave him that decisive argument that you could die the next day. How do you explain being already that much aware of death at that age?

This comes from an experience. My parents travelled and I grew up on the road; we didn't settle down until I was 14. When I was 9, my father and I went to India, to Benares. Before tattooing, he was a jeweller and we came to buy silver—it was cheaper out there. He took me to see the burning Ghats (*where the cremations of dead people are done*), by the side of the Ganges. I still remember, as we got nearer I could smell it. It made my mouth water, salivate. It smelled good... seriously! That is until I saw what I was smelling. When we got to the Ghats we spent the afternoon there, and sat for several hours to watch as a body was being burned. This changed my life.

How?

It gave me the understanding that we're just animals, we're meat. We're nothing special and we're here for a short time. I think after that, it really

gave me the kick to want to do things, to profit from my life to the fullest. But even before that I already liked skulls. I've been collecting bones since I was a little kid, all kinds. You know, for a time we lived in a van with my parents, I had to make my own toys, we didn't have a lot of money. I found animal bones and I built little temples... I was always interested in the skull because that was the piece of the machine that held the brain, the command centre. To me it was like a sacred object, something special. I'm not into death at all, or into morbid things, I don't like horror movies... I might have a skull on my logo but I always saw it as a positive for me. It's a celebration of what we are.

Tattoos are ephemeral. How does the artist feel towards the short lifespan of the tattooer's creations?

My life's work only lives as long as the people I've worked on, and maybe it will survive in photography. But sometimes I thought that if I would have chosen to make sculptures, my work would live a long time. The energy I put into what I do would be around for much longer for people to see. Tattooing is just a short lived art form actually. What do you get? 70? 80 years? It's strange when I hear that people with back pieces that have done have

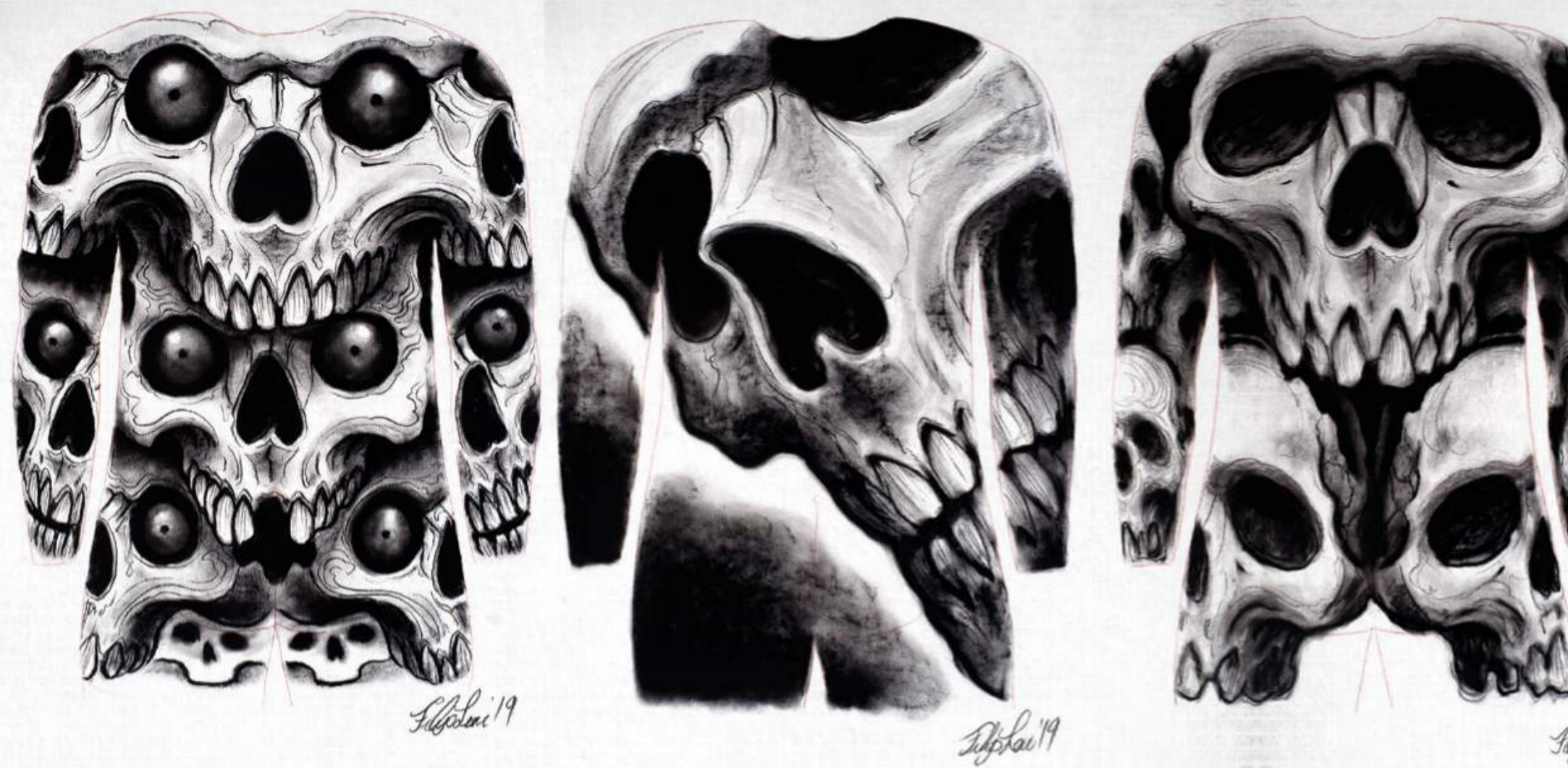
died. People I have tattooed that are no longer here. I feel a little sad: "*Oh, he's gone, I liked that one*".

What makes you sadder? The loss of the human or the art?

The tattoo! It's my work! I normally spend a considerable amount of time with people, it's a very intense contact that can last one year or two or three, until the work is done, but then, out of a hundred people, there might be one or two that stay in my life, socially. The other ones I don't see so often; life goes on and people move on. My only memories of the work are the photos I keep.

When did you understand you wanted to tattoo bodysuits?

I decided this right in the beginning. I started tattooing with my father when I was 14 and in 1984 when I was 16 we went to Amsterdam for Henk Schiffmacher's first convention in the Paradiso. It was amazing. I got to see many bodysuits and I knew then that's what I wanted to do. By the time I was 17, I travelled to Japan where I fell in love with the idea of bodysuits even more. The suits I was seeing there were so beautiful. When you look at them, you don't even care what the actual images in the tattoo are. It's the effect of this one overall piece of clothing. I re-



ally thought that was the ultimate in a tattoo... it was one story, one idea. I admired the Japanese tradition of only one overall tattoo on the body. But I found it so artistic compared to some of the other stuff I had seen until then in tattooing. I can remember sitting around with these guys, in Horikin's studio, just looking at them, getting lost in the designs on their shoulders: it was big black lines, nice shading, bright colours...

Getting a bodysuit was not something common in the western world, people weren't ready for that...

We did our best to educate people to the beauty of a bodysuit. I would draw a lot of custom designs and would show clients all my reference books. If you look at my book collection in my studio, it's dog-eared and well-worn because over the years I've shown it to everybody looking for inspiration. Travelling abroad and coming home to

Switzerland helped me in advising clients because people trusted me more. Once they heard I had been to Japan and to America, they had more confidence in me. Now the new generation is very lucky, they get to do these big works right away. I started out with the little stuff and I worked my way up to the big pieces. It's been a long, long road, to get to the big work.

What percentage of your work does the creation of bodysuits represent?

Half is bodysuits in progress and the other half is collectors adding to their existing work, people that already have a lot of tattoos and want to fill in spots. I help them to finish their suits. Now, so many people are in pursuit of a bodysuit. It took me maybe 40 years of tattooing to get my body just about done. I have my armpits left and a little bit of a cover on my front, and then I'm done. The fastest I've done this on somebody else's body was 9 months, about 80 hours to fill in his body. That takes se-

rious dedication. Usually it takes a few years. To do it like in Japan is my ultimate dream. If you think about Horitoshi I (*Japanese tattooer working in Tokyo*) for example, he's got maybe 30-40 people to work on at the same time, and once one person is finished he accepts a new one. It's like an assembly line. To me that would be my dream. I'm getting there slowly but I still don't discriminate and, if somebody travels half around the world to see me, I'll tattoo them if I can fit them in.

How do you feel about your own bodysuit?

I rarely show my body. I don't have to. When I had just a few tattoos I had to show them all the time. Now that I'm fully tattooed it gives me strength to know that I wear my suit with pride. That's all I need, the power, it's in your mind. Because you just remember how hard that was, right? And that's the power I got out of tattooing. To know that I did this. It's not nothing. There's a lot of people that would like to have a bodysuit but just don't have the power. I suffered, you know. Now they have the luxury of doing little sprays, creams... it is a whole new world, right? Good for them, but it was important for me to suffer like that in the sense of—and I'm not a masochist,

Now that I'm fully tattooed it gives me strength to know that I wear my suit with pride. That's all I need, the power, it's in your mind



at all, I hate the pain—that I’m proud of myself for having been able to do it. Because it was hard.

Bill Salmon sadly passed away recently, but he also had a very avant-gardist vision of tattooing.

In which way did he influence you? You’ve seen Bill’s body right? It was done by Hardy but all his tattoos are Bill’s ideas. They use the word a lot today: visionary. I don’t use it that much, but Bill, he was visionary. He could dream up these ideas. Bill, me, Luke, Junii and Horitoshi I, did a big Hannya mask in 2004. It went from the man’s shoulder, down his back and leg till his ankle. I couldn’t even understand what Bill was talking about at first. He had to draw it on the guy, and show us some pictures so that we could get his

idea. He was very playful, he would think outside the box. Bill was doing kiddy tattoos back in the 80’s, these were children’s drawings tattooed on their parents. Something like what Yann Black does today. Bill was doing this in the 80’s. To him it was not just about the biggest tattoo is the best, it’s what does it mean to you.

He would have people come in the studio and there would be a consultation without obligation. Then they would come back for a fitting, like a suit: see the design, look how it fitted on the arm, look in the mirror... then they would get an appointment to come back. Three appointments before the work even started. Bill was an interesting man because he came into tattooing as a tattoo collector first, and then he started tattooing. First he had

all these tattoos done on himself, he was almost full.

His concept, what he taught me was, making tattoos is an experience, it’s the ride through the whole trip, the meeting, the time spent together, the research. He really, really taught me a lot about making people comfortable. Bringing them a drink, giving them a nice pillow, having a break when needed. Not this whole, the classical: “*Sit down, shut up, bing-bang-boom-get the fuck out!*”. He wasn’t like that at all. At first he worked at home. He was a lot like my father was. That’s why I liked working with Bill so much. My father was about that too, about the experience. He wouldn’t tattoo people he didn’t like. No matter how much money they had, fuck off! You know what I mean, if they weren’t cool. ▣

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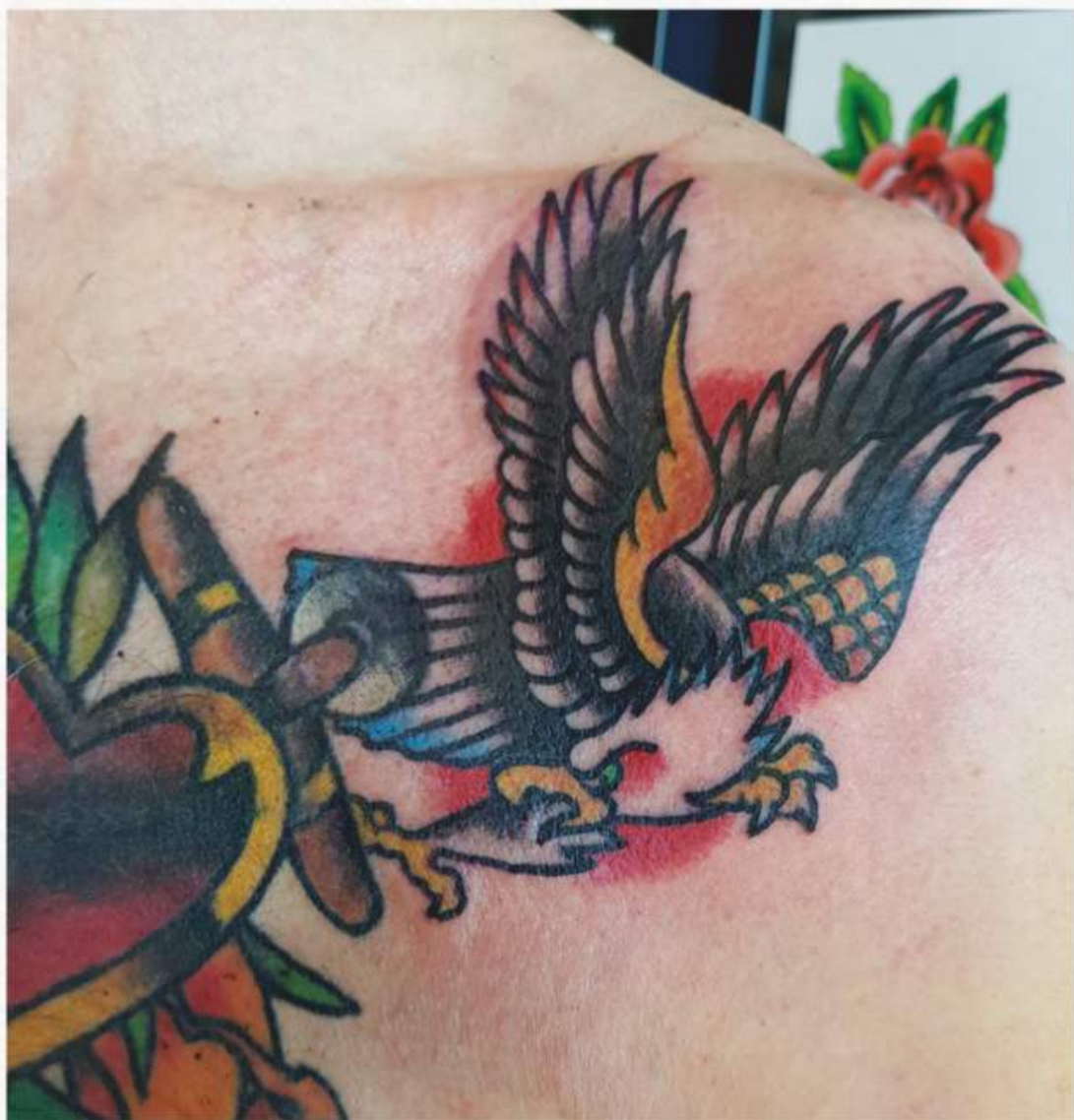
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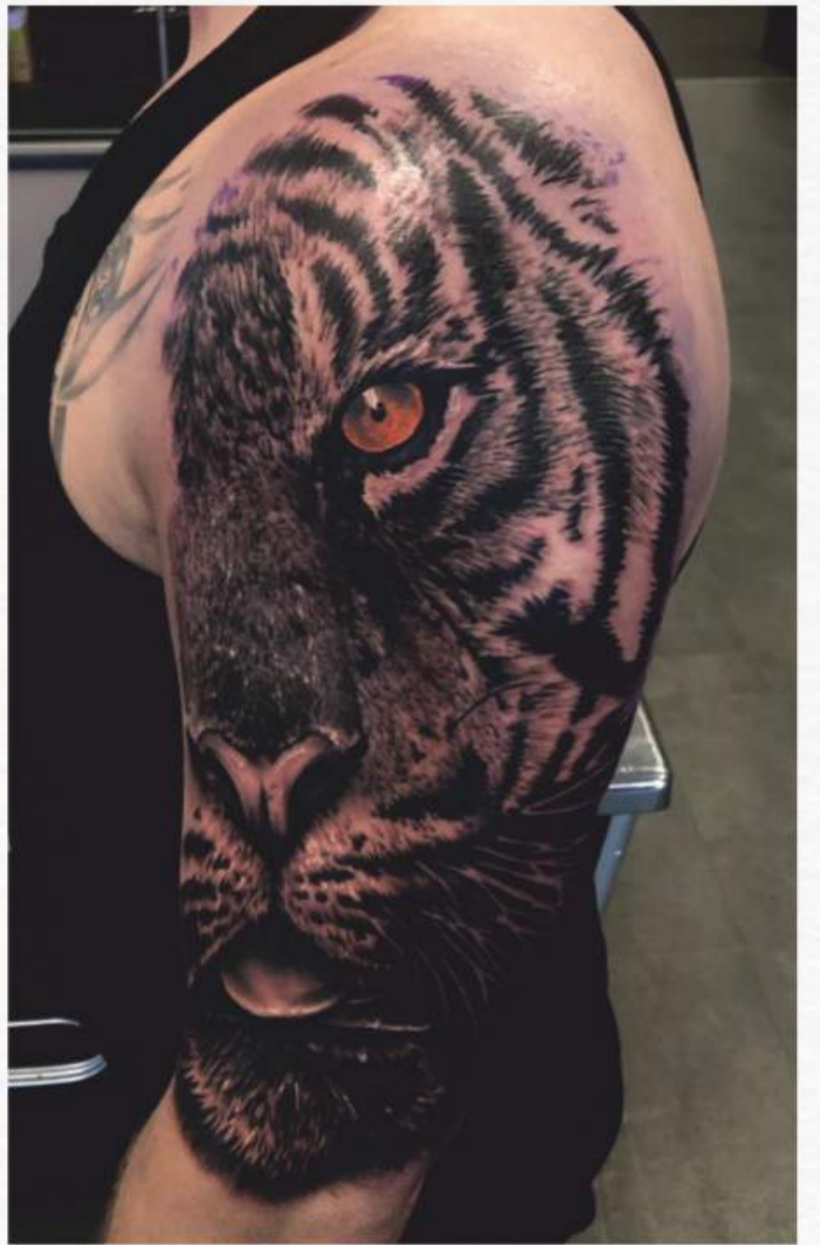
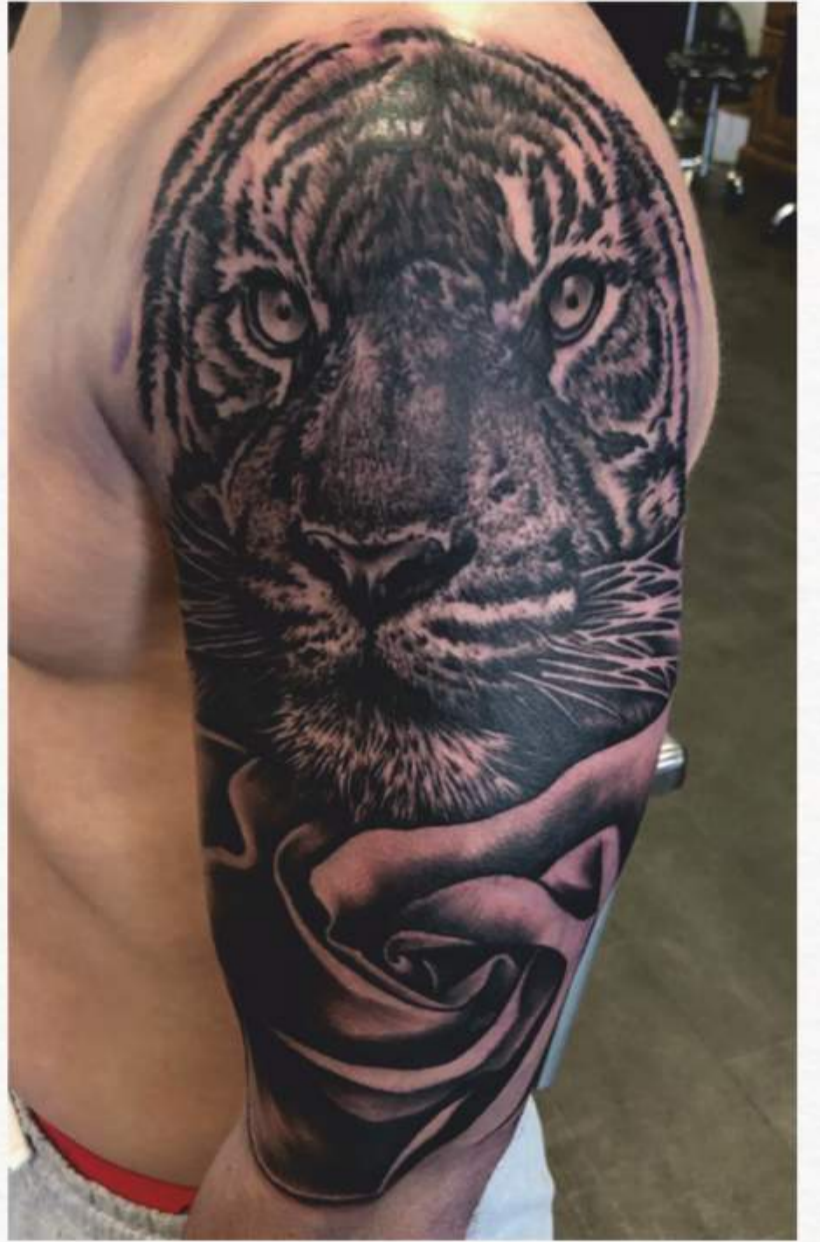
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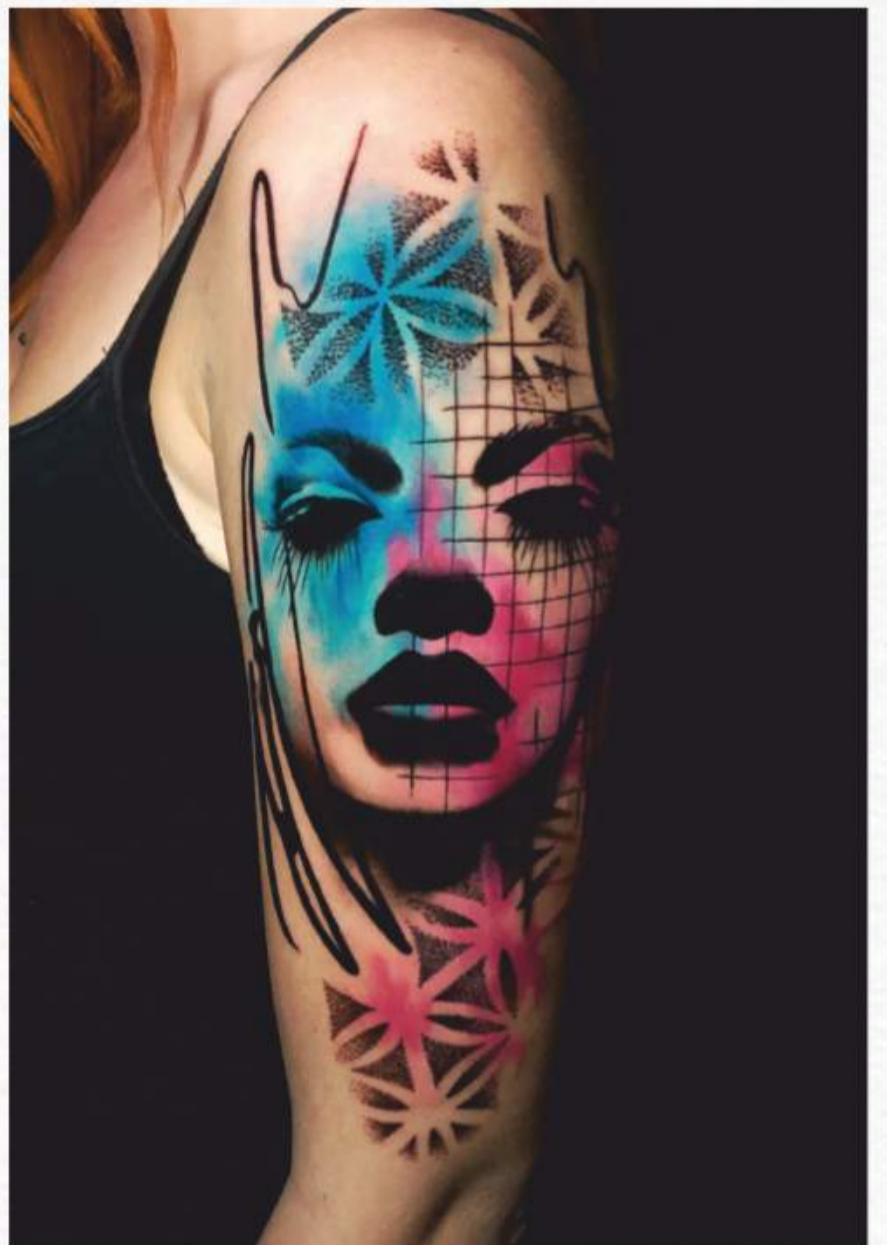


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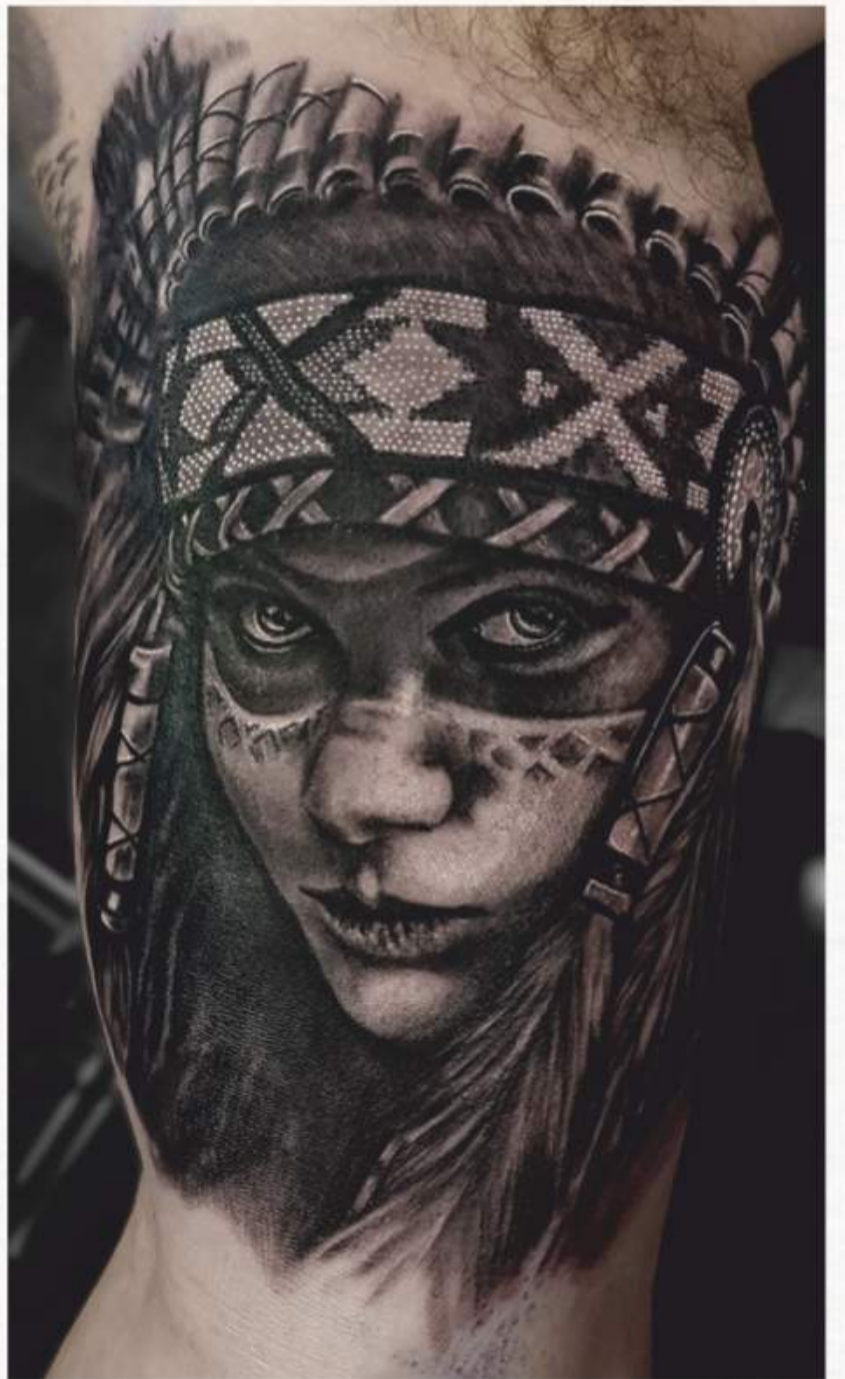


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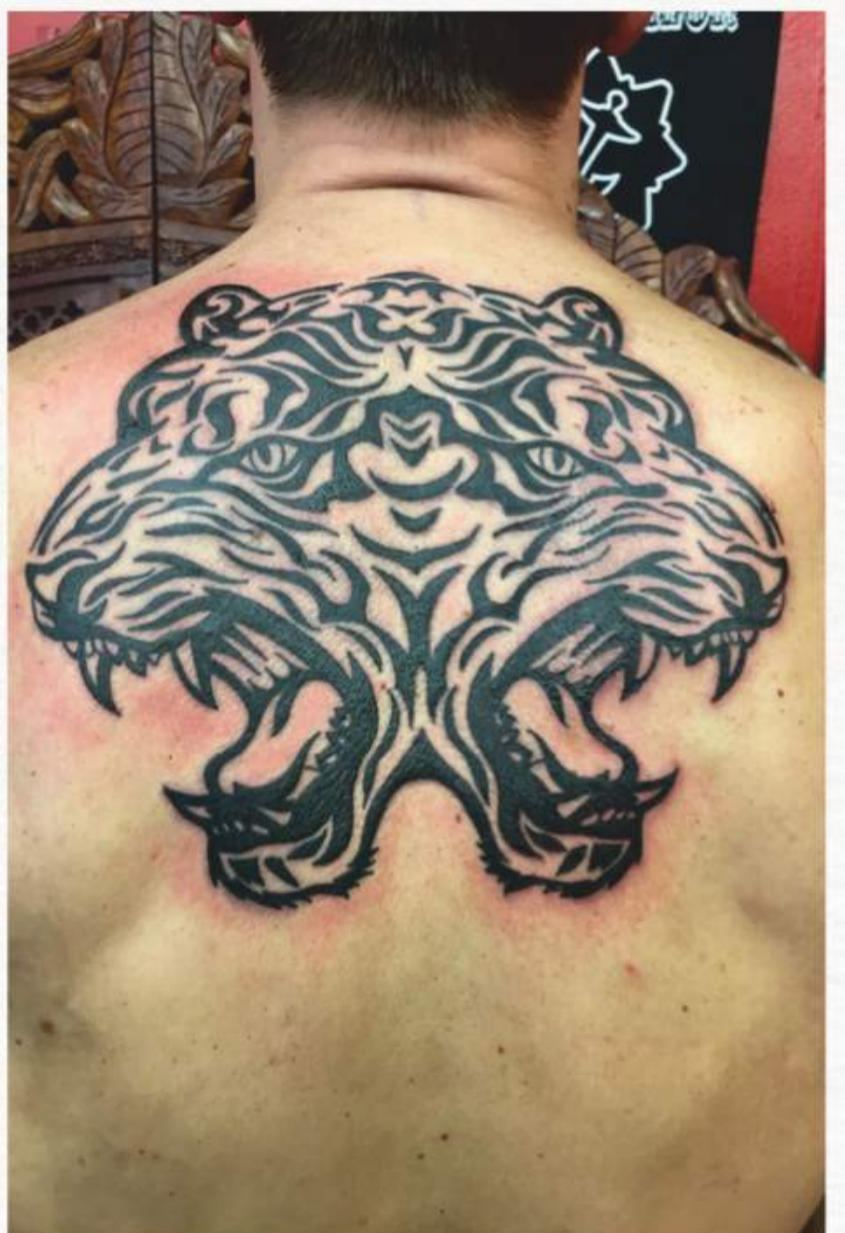
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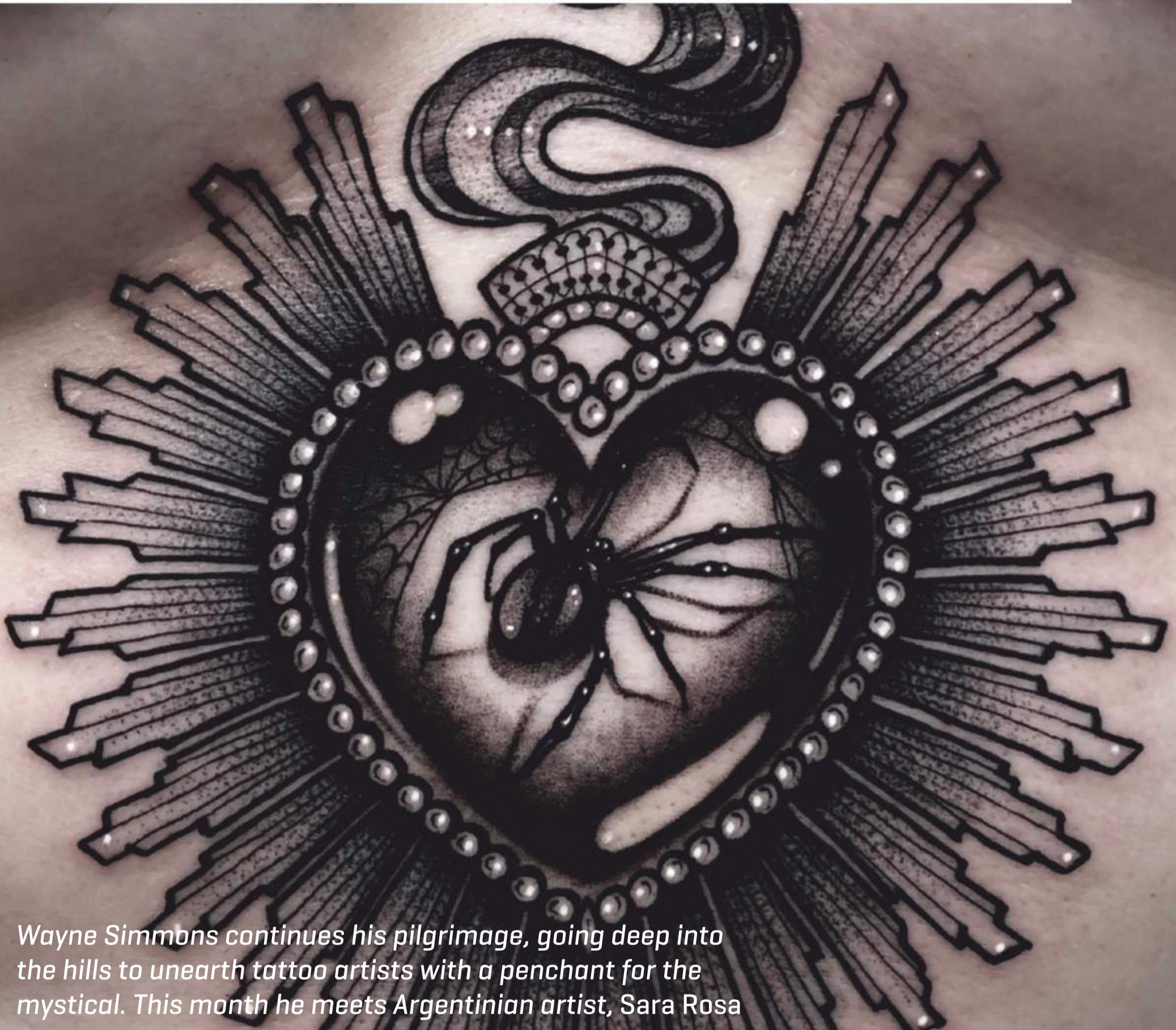


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AS ABOVE,



Wayne Simmons continues his pilgrimage, going deep into the hills to unearth tattoo artists with a penchant for the mystical. This month he meets Argentinian artist, Sara Rosa

[sararosacorazon.art](https://www.instagram.com/sararosacorazon.art)

Tattoos with Higher Purpose

SO BELOW



If the client is uncomfortable or nervous, it could in some way interfere with my concentration and affect my work

I recently visited the local Tibetan Buddhist Centre for their weekly 'Meditation Mondays' class. It mostly involved a guided meditation but at the start and end there was some chanting, mostly in a language I was unfamiliar with and, to be honest, I found it something of a challenge to keep up.

But then something really interesting happened: the chanting turned into song and suddenly those unfamiliar words and sounds became more... familiar. I realised that singing those words, verbalising those strange sounds through music, was much easier than simply speaking them. And suddenly the whole thing came alive to me.



I like shocking images and I work hard to make sure that what's in my mind is accurately reflected in my tattoos

There's a power in music, a spiritual quality in song, that nobody can deny. It resonates with us, bringing out the kind of transformation that would make a believer out of even the most hardened of atheists. Music is a ritual we can all get behind, our favourite songs like prayers or mantras that lift us from the mire as we travel along life's winding road — simply put, it's medicine for the soul.

This is something that Argentinian artist, Sara Rosa, believes in strongly. A big part of her tattooing ritual includes music — and crucially the right music. She involves

her clients in this process, too, letting them choose whatever they want to listen to while getting tattooed by her.

"It's the thing I care most about when it comes to creating the right environment," she tells me. "If the client is uncomfortable or nervous, it could in some way interfere with my concentration and affect my work. There's no other element I can think of that breaks my concentration more during tattooing."

Like the other artists I've interviewed for this series, Sara injects something of the mystical into her art. "The devil's in the detail," her Instagram account reads, and it's a perfect way to capture what she's all about: the themes of her tattoos draw heavily upon the occult, her black-work style some of the most intricately executed I've seen to date. And yet despite the intricate nature of her art, despite the strong and often complex occult imagery she works with, her tattoos remain super clean. Nothing ever seems crowded, everything in proportion and balanced with everything else — which is no mean feat.

"I am very meticulous with my work. I love the details, the straight lines, the neatness. I like shocking images and I







I think we are all connected in one way or another and that energy never dies, it transforms

work hard to make sure that what's in my mind is accurately reflected in my tattoos. It's funny," she laughs, "because in 'real life' I'm absolutely the opposite: disorderly, distracted. I guess my work is like a bubble in my personality."

Rather aptly, the whole concept of opposites attracting and eventually merging is a common theme within occult work and many of the Eastern traditions it is largely derived from. And it doesn't stop there with Sara - despite the metaphysical elements within her art, Sara herself identifies as an atheist. Yet, for her, this doesn't exclude spirituality from her life —quite the opposite, in fact. "I actually consider myself an extremely spiritual person. I think we are all connected in one way or another and that energy never dies, it transforms."

I see a range of esoteric expression within Sara's art - some of her tattoos draw heavily from Eastern traditions, but she's mostly working with concepts and ideas that have a distinctly occult or pagan feel. Not surprisingly,

she has a fondness for the more visual elements within such - astrology, symbology and mythology.

"Ritualism has always interested me," she tells me. "I consider anything described as 'hidden' to be the most interesting to investigate. I guess I am naturally a very curious person. I never stop researching, thinking about and then drawing the things that catch my attention."

Her clients help further her research. It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation, actually —they come to her because of the kind of work she puts out, and yet much of the work she puts out is inspired by and, in some cases, shaped by their ideas and visions of what their tattoos should be.

"It's curious but the subject of religion and beliefs always come up while I'm tattooing," she explains. "Normally the people who like my designs are into the same things as I am, or something similar." A lot of her tattoos focus on the divine feminine, for example, and that's



Normally the people who like my designs are into the same things as I am, or something similar

something that her clients have helped develop her interest in. “They feel that my style of tattooing would match with what they want to reflect and for some reason, now, I find myself drawing female figures most days.” This is part of the job Sara really enjoys —meeting people from all parts of the world with different traditions and interests. “It is a constant means of growth for me,” she says.

Evolving as an artist —and all that this entails—is clearly what life is about for Sara. She moved to Barcelona nine months ago, currently working at Gold Street Tattoo, and she’s got a lot on her plate right now. She’s compiling

an illustration book, she’s planning a run of guest spots throughout Europe for the end of the year and she’ll no doubt be hitting some conventions.

“I’ve been tattooing for two years now,” she tells me, “and yet I still consider myself an apprentice.”

In a sense, maybe, everyone with Sara’s humility, every artist that remains open to learning new things, to realising the concepts and ideas of their clients in the way Sara does, is an apprentice in some way.

And as someone on the other side of the needle, that’s music to my ears. ▣



RACING EXTINCTION

Petros Ballas and his brother Panos have just one mission—to save the ocean. And they’ve recruited a team of artists to help. Rebecca Givens chats to the Crying Oceans founder about what’s happening to our oceans and how the tattoo industry intends to do something about it.



Green Turtle entangled in a fishing net and strangled to death.

What is the Crying Oceans project and how did it start?

Myself and my brother, we were brought up in Greece, next to the sea. Our memories have always involved blue waters—the beautiful Greek beaches have embedded in me a really strong sense of belonging with the oceans. We have a connection to the great liquid lakes that cover this wonderful spinning rock, a connection that runs deep in our lives, and it stings quite a lot to see what we’re doing to them.

I felt that we had been given a responsibility to take care of it all, but I knew that there was only so much I could

do on my own! We wanted to do something, we knew that people liked good clothing, and we knew how inclusive and forward thinking the underground and alternative scene can be.

Crying Oceans collaborates with tattoo artists from around the world to create the best looking ocean-saving t-shirts. 30% of all profits are donated to organisations that fight for the deep blue and money also goes back to the artists. We are already proud supporters of Sea Shepards and we can’t wait to open up and start working with even more amazing organisations!

Why did you choose to focus on the ocean specifically?

After watching the documentary *Racing Extinction* I said to myself “I need to do something”. The film left me heartbroken and devastated to say the least. As I watched, tears rolling down my cheeks, I wondered why these amazing creatures come to meet such violent deaths. The why is pretty obvious though—it comes down to greed! The great beauties of our oceans are being unnecessarily and often cruelly killed for the consumer’s whim and insatiable appetite. It’s really a pathway to self-destruction and we ought to wake up before it’s too late.



ALFREDO PIRIGENTS



THE CRYING OCEANS TATTOO ARTIST TEAM

Not all heroes wear capes. Shout out to the best, baddest and most efficient ocean defenders on the planet...

Abel Miranda, Alex The Jem, Alfredo Pirigents, Angelianna Koroniou, Ashley Tyson, Carina Schmidt, Carolin Walch, Chloe Aspey, Christian Vetea, Dale Frame, Delphine Noiztoy, Doug Hand, Dustin S Kaiju, Eftim Rusev, Ernest Graves, Eva Szolnoki, Faye Retinioti, Gabriele Fiorenza, Hannah Flowers, Hannah Keuls, Hanumantra, Henry Hate, Immoral Youth, Irene Fraenkl-Riatti, James Robinson, Jo Harrison, Joanne Baker, Jonny Firth, Juano San, Kayne Sherwood, Kirk Budden, Lady Chappelle, Laura Firth, Liz Mason, Luke Jinks, Malvina Maria Wisniewska, Marvin Fitzner, Matthew James, Meehow Kotarski, Miguel Angel, Mike Stout, Naresh Bhana, Nick Divine, Nick Whybrow, Nikole Lowe, Paul Goodwin, Paul Talbot, Pete Goerlitz, Riley Alexander, Rob DeCor, Rose Harley, Sam Carver, Sophie Rose, Stacey Night, Sven Babuzi, Szidónia Csenge Gergely, Tom Maggot, Tzenio Pirigents, Vicky Morgan

Countless manta rays in Indonesia are being fished, hacked and chopped up for superstitious remedies or elegant gourmet dishes. Over 300 whales are slaughtered each year by so-called ‘researchers’ in Japanese waters in what is, if you ask me, just a well-disguised whale hunt. Of those that were slaughtered during the 2017 / 2018 season, 122 of them were pregnant—we are talking about a whole generation of whales being wiped out and lost, as females only give birth to one calf a year, sometimes every second year. There is absolutely no excuse for the slaughter of hundreds of these beautiful ocean giants.

It is a privilege to live in a country which is surrounded by sea, yet a daunting thought often crosses my mind in the midst of my peaceful surroundings... what is going on down there in the blue? Is the ocean suffering due to our indifference?

I think a lot of people don’t realise how badly the oceans need looking after right now.

Yes, I agree, they don’t. Maybe some people do but not enough, and I’m including myself too. For ages man has exploited the deep blues, for money, and eventually for greed. We think that its rich resources will never end and yet today we have so many species that are endangered, such as whales, sharks and dolphins. It’s all down to a greedy mindset, like a person who piles up their dinner plate just to throw half away.

About 90% of all large shark species have been fished out of the oceans in the last 50 years or so. We can’t begin to perceive the danger this places in



An Atlantic Grey Seal, tragically caught in remainings of fishing net in Norfolk England.



MATTHEW JAMES



Sea Shepherd



Shark fins dried under the hot sun at fisherman village in Asia.



Dead endangered sea turtle washed up on beach with fishing net wrapped around it



Minke whale tangled up in a fishing net.



Plastic-Sea



the ocean's ecosystem. Sharks as predators contribute to the swimming formations and act as forms of camouflage for many species of smaller fish. Without sharks, this would be seriously tampered with. What's worse is the horrific way in which most sharks are fished and left to die a slow and painful death at the bottom of the ocean beds, helpless and bleeding to death. Meanwhile man sips on a soup made from its fins, in a civilised manner, paying a highly civilised price for it. Who is the beast in this story?

As we well know, where there's a demand, sure enough, there will be a supplier, especially if the demand becomes lucrative. How come shark fin trade is illegal, yet at any time one could walk into a top-notch Chinese restaurant here in London and order a bowl or two of shark fin soup?

The oceans are in danger and it needs people like you and me to do what is necessary to protect and restore them back to what we knew them to be.

Is plastic a big focus when thinking about why the ocean is in trouble?

Plastic is indeed one of the biggest issues—it really is a



Whaling in the Faroe Islands

horror show!

Just a few months ago in a canal in the province of Songkhla, a dead whale was spotted which (according to locals) just before it died, spat out five plastic bags. An autopsy was then carried out only to discover that this pilot whale had 80 big black rubbish plastic bags in its stomach. A total of eight kilos of human trash was found in



KIRK BUDDEN

it, which is what ultimately killed this beautiful animal. I read about a marine biologist and lecturer at Kasetsart University who said that each year at least 300 sea animals including whales, dolphins, turtles and more die due to plastic. We use a lot of plastic and it must stop.

With more than eight million tons of plastic dropped in our oceans annually, is it not time we put our heads together for a solution? Next time you go shopping, whether with a bag, basket or trolley, just count the plastic items in there. You will most likely be shocked at discovering just how much of a problem we are causing for the environment.

Let's go deep into the merchandise you sell—you recently made some changes to the items, am I right?

Yes. Crying Oceans will only be using 100% organic cotton in our merchandise.

Polyester is all made from synthetic fibres and we found some brands that do use recycled plastic to create poly-

ester clothing, which you would think is good, right? Taking plastic waste to turn it into clothing to reuse. But there are a couple of huge flaws to this process. Firstly, it encourages people to think that if you recycle you're doing a good job! Often our recycling efforts just end up in the ocean due to lack of infrastructure. The UK is currently dealing with a huge problem with waste being sent back due to it being exported illegally! Secondly, every time we wash synthetic fabrics, whether they are made from recycled plastic or brand new materials, really small tiny plastic pieces called microfibres wash off and flow down the drain. We're talking hundreds to thousands for each wash. These fibres are so tiny that water treatment filters don't catch them all, so it ends up in the ocean. And when the microfibres reach the ocean they act like sponges, sucking other pollutants around them—imagine mini bombs full of oil, pesticides and industrial chemicals that end up in the bellies of fish and eventually us. It's estimated that there are over 1.4



JO HARRISON



million trillion microfibrils in our oceans.

So, we have just recently changed our supplier and are now getting GOTS certified materials. GOTS is a rigorous certification for organic cotton material. It involves strict controls throughout the entire manufacturing process including ecological and social criteria, backed up by independent certification of the entire textile supply chain. Our new online store will be set to launch in Spring 2019.

So when up and running, where can customers expect their money to go when they buy from Crying Oceans?

We donate 30% of all profits to three non-profit organisations, 10% to each one. One of them being Sea Shepherd, who have waged a 12-year high-seas battle against whaling in the Southern ocean and have successfully saved thousands of my favourite giant mammals and brought the slaughter to the world's attention. If you're unfamiliar with Sea Shepherd then know that they are the ones



NICK DEVINE



meeting those gross, barbarous whaling ships head on. They're the crazy guys who go into the middle of the ocean and scuttle illegal whaling ships, defending the whales with their own ships when they need to. Sea Shepherd was initially set up by Paul Watson in 1977 under the name Earth Force Society, but has now evolved into a recognisable and punk-rock ocean activist group who have also gained a great backing from the alternative music scene.

Why did you choose to get the tattoo industry on board?

I was brought up with tattoos and throughout my life people with tattoos have always been the ones who are brave enough to make a statement, even if that statement is a permanent mark on their body. We, as Crying Oceans, are trying to make a statement, we're trying to fight for



our oceans. We choose to work with the underdogs because they're always the ones to get it done. If you look at history, the biggest revolts, and the ones that formed community to fight back against oppression, always came from the ones at the bottom of the pile.

So how can our readers get involved?

Because of changing our supplier, our new store has been slightly delayed but will be launched in Spring 2019. In the meantime, follow us on Instagram @cryingoceans.team and head on over to cryingoceans.com where everything will be kicking off soon!

And if you're a tattoo artist, we would love it if you joined us! We need as many artists as possible to spread the word and fight for this cause—email lui@cryingoceans.com or DM us on Instagram to become part of the team. ▣

SEA

seashepherd.tattoo
seashepherdglobal.org www.facebook.com/seashepherdglobal

SHEPHERD

As a valuable addition to the previous feature, let's take a closer look at Sea Shepherd as Fade FX whips over to Amsterdam to investigate further...



Art and activism have always been good friends so it's no surprise tattooing has been known to cross into political territory.

Last year, a tattoo studio opened that embodies the partnership of tattooing and activism like no other, at the Sea Shepherd HQ in Amsterdam.

Sea Shepherd is a marine conservation society but more than this, an international direct action movement, operational for over 40 years, last year alone they maintained 30 active sea campaigns that spanned the globe.

Their missions aren't for the faint hearted, in 1994 a Sea Shepherd team famously scuttled the illegally operated Norwegian whaling vessel *Senet* in southern Norway, fast forward to January 2019 and a campaign vessel was attacked by poachers with rocks and molotovs in the Mexican Gulf of California.

Undeterred, the organisation is made up of hundreds of dedicated volunteers from more than 30 countries and continues to grow.

Brighton tattooist Fade FX went to interview Sea Shepherd Artistic Director Geert Vons, to discuss how tattooing is now becoming an integral part of the organisation's expansion by reaching new audiences beyond environmentalism.

Geert is a tattooist himself with 25 years experience and coincidentally became a Sea Shepherd volunteer at

the same time he began tattooing.

Speaking to Fade for the record he explains international conservation laws exist, but many nations lack the capacity to uphold them, especially as they need to be supported with a degree of justifiable force.

Sea Shepherd supply their own ships and crew in assistance of the coast guard, local authorities and legal bodies with the power to make necessary arrests in what is the only effective way to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing head on.

This year, in recognition of their patrols in West Africa supporting the Liberian coast guard, they received a military honour, the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) by Liberian President Dr. George Manneh Weah at the 62nd anniversary celebration of Armed Forces Day in Monrovia on February 11.

This is the highest military award given by the Ministry of National Defence and the Armed Forces of Liberia, recognising exceptional service to the Republic.

The award is indicative of the indispensability of Sea Shepherd operations at a time when ocean life is at breaking point.

Consumers are generally unaware that marine species have decreased by 39% in as many years and illegal, unregulated fishing constitutes an estimated 11-26 million tonnes (12-28%) of fishing worldwide.

Similarly almost 30% of fish stocks are overfished, over 60% of stocks are fully fished and use of illegal types of net result in over 300,000 whales and dolphins being killed annually through entanglement alone.





It's a deadly, tragic reality that Sea Shepherd are confronting with every voyage, but more resources and campaign funds are always needed.

Geert himself is a veteran of 4 anti whaling missions in the Antarctic and in launching Sea Shepherd Tattoo he's interjecting a new perspective in creative fundraising, where artists and clients alike can support the cause.

Fade has recently been one such artist, last year she held a Flash Day at her Brighton studio and has since tattooed mandala animals and breaching whales in dot realism at Sea Shepherd Tattoo, raising over €1,500 in the process, funds that go directly to sea conservation.

The doors and the books are open, ready for mass collaboration which includes Sea Shepherd booths at conventions all over the world.

As a tattooist himself, Geert knows he's tapping into a rich industry full of dedicated, socially conscious people, often widely travelled and with the means to give something back making them ideal candidates to step up and get involved.

As travellers they potentially witness environmental impact and changing landscapes first hand, an experience that could make them inclined to support campaigns.

This rings true with Fade having spent much time in South East Asia she came face to face with the consequences of deforestation from intensive logging, a subject that's touched upon in her film, 'The Point of No Return' which documents the hand tapped tattooing techniques of the Iban tribe in Borneo.

Sea Shepherd Tattoo opened with welcome donations

of a chair and oak workbench from friends of friends and has now launched its own vegan ink brand, available from Tattoland or their own website and Facebook page, all profits go directly to fighting the good fight.

There are grand plans for a wider network of artists, a gallery space, benefit gigs and more, plans are coming together and ideas are always welcome.

'All art should have a message' Geert muses, 'its a language so what's the point of creating art if you don't have anything to say?'

Sea Shepherd always put their money where their mouth is and their message is loud and clear.

As ever, the time to get involved is now and the organisation is calling on tattooists to become featured guest artists at the Amsterdam studio, to hold art auctions, exhibitions and Sea Shepherd days in their own studios, to purchase their ink brand and merchandise (even add a range of Sea Shepherd T shirts to your shop rail) and actively spread the word throughout the tattoo community by any means necessary. The more adventurous can even volunteer on board a campaign ship, all skills are welcome.

If all we have to offer is art, never forget this is a limitless medium that communicates on an influential level, more so than the dry realm of statistics that are too easy to ignore. Everyone can do something. Creativity is key to grabbing an audience, making them think and shaking things up.

For the present and for the future, Sea Shepherd needs more creative allies, more fundraisers, more action, as the old saying goes, 'If not now, when? If not you, who?' ▣



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GANGNAM STYLE

I recently took my Asian travels up a notch with a visit to the much-talked-about but often misunderstood South Korea. Following a week in the nation's capital, Seoul, I can confirm it is one of the most brilliant places I've visited. Full of interesting sights and sounds, it's bursting with creativity and although it's pretty much illegal to tattoo, amazing artists are sprouting up around the country. Artists like the incredibly talented (and badass) Yoojin.

stnratt · brain_flavor

I don't really remember when I first discovered tattoos, but I do remember watching a TV show called Miami Ink during a family trip to Saipan," says Yoojin, recalling a vacation to the Northern Mariana Islands that would spark a lifelong love affair with tattoos. "It was probably my first time watching an American TV channel," she continues. "That's when I was still a kid and I remember thinking that tattooing looked so interesting and really cool."

Intrigue and entertainment aside, she didn't make much of her fascination with ink until years later when she found herself desperately seeking motivation in school. "I was in university, struggling with my school projects," she remembers. "I lost interest in everything I was doing in school, so I de-

cidated to make a list of what I liked and what I wanted to try. Tattooing was one of them, so I paid to learn how to tattoo at a tattoo shop."

With that, Yoojin reveals the first difference between tattooing and apprenticeships as we know them in the West and the rules that govern the art form in her home country. The second major difference? South Korea considers tattooing to be a medical service, so while it's not illegal to get tattooed, any tattooer who isn't also a medical practitioner is actually breaking the law.

"To be honest, for me, I think being a tattoo artist in Korea is pretty cool—if you stay out of trouble and you do it right," she says. "It is illegal, but if you stay lowkey, I think it's fine." The real concern, as she points out, is that because of the necessary secrecy "a lot of

Being a tattoo artist in Korea is pretty cool — if you stay out of trouble and you do it right

FRIENDS FOREVER



ALL
LOVE

tattooers are not fully aware of proper sanitary knowledge. I was one of them too," she admits, "but since I started traveling to places where it's legal to make tattoos, I learned so many things and realised I had only limited knowledge about sanitary practices. The truth hurts, but that's what happening right now in Korea."

Despite the obstacles, not once has she second-guessed her decision. "I never had fears or worries about being a full-time tattoo artist," she states, thinking back to her formative years. "I just always wanted to be a full-time tattoo artist so bad, even when I had no clients."

"I was always, and still am, so grateful that I'm doing what I like, and that I found what I like. So when I got into the tattoo scene, I never thought about doing anything else," she elaborates. "I [wanted to] make art and I think tattooing is an amazing way to express my thoughts and visions," she adds before concluding, "I want to be an artist with interesting artwork who also makes good tattoos."

A Different Perspective

While Yoojin herself has never had any scary encounters with the law, she admits that bad things can certainly happen to tattooers who are discovered working without a medical license. "I know if it's your first time getting caught, you have to pay a fine," she reveals. "But if it's your second time in a certain amount of years, you might have to go to jail."

It's no surprise then that tattoo studios have gone underground. Yes, "there are a few communities trying to change the law, but I'm not fully aware of what's going on," she says. Even so, tattoo sightings on the street are not uncommon, even if they aren't always warmly received.

"In my point of view, the majority of young people think it's cool to have tattoos, but there are so many different groups of people out here in this world," she points out. "I think I am surrounded by people who enjoy art and are supportive of it, so I have never had any bad experiences come from me showing off my tattoos."

That being said, "people do stare at your tattoos if you have a lot of them. I think there are a lot more older people who see tattoos negatively," she explains. "I haven't had a bad comment from a random person, but I have heard some stories about random elders saying bad

things about people just because they had tattoos."

Asked to describe an ideal future, Yoojin's hope for the tattoo scene in South Korea is pretty simple: "Whether it's legal or ille-



Whether it's legal or illegal, I just hope people get the right sanitary knowledge and enjoy making and getting tattoos

gal, I just hope people get the right sanitary knowledge and enjoy making and getting tattoos. There are so many brilliant tattoo artists in Korea and I strongly believe there are going to be more and more, so I hope that one day people will understand that a tattoo is also an art piece, not just a tattoo."

"For me, I'm collecting art pieces on my body, not on the walls of my house," she elaborates. "I hope people will understand that tattooing nowadays is not just drawings on skin—it's also art pieces—so let's be respectful to both artists and clients."

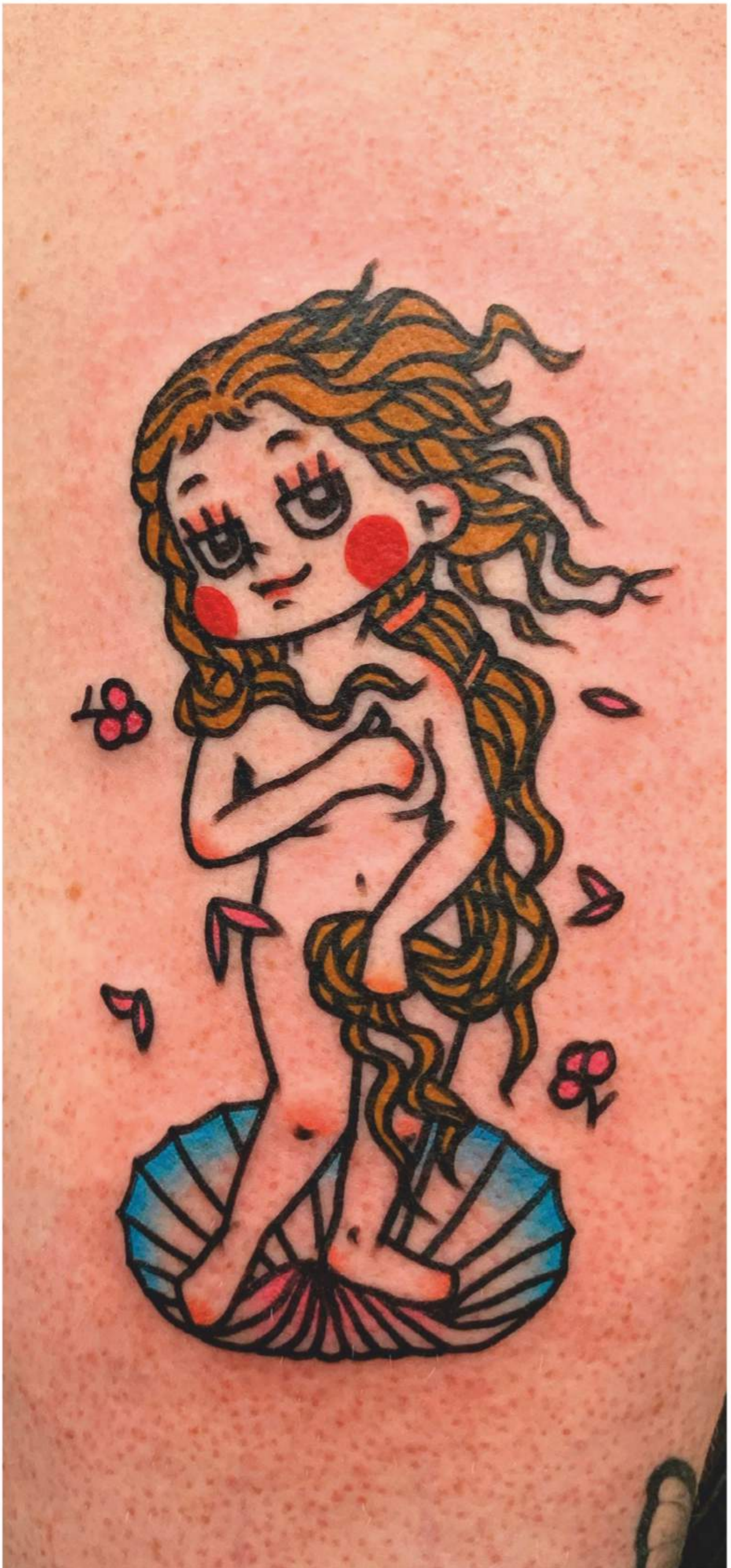
Traveling West

If you're loving Yoojin's work and would like to track her down, she's one of five artists who currently call Seoul's 432hz Tattoo Studio home. "My closest friends and the most adorable tattoo couple in this world are the owners of @studio_432hz," she gushes. "They're @ssun_from_love and @woo_loves_you. We became friends when we met at a tattoo convention and since then, we have been supportive of each other. They are my mentors and the tattooers I admire most. Their art is amazing—it always brings good vibes—and I feel happy when I'm with them. There's no stress and no negativity."

Then there's @chance_village "and we also have @jtt-play who is my bestie. She's so great at making tattoos and art and is also an independent, strong girl who I have a lot

Yoojin On... Her Personal Ink

Asked to look down at her personal collection of ink and highlight any pieces that jump out at her, Yoojin says, "I don't have a favourite because I love them all equally! They each have their own different precious story, soul of the artist and mine, so I can't pick one."





I hope people will understand that tattooing nowadays is not just drawings on skin — it's also art pieces — so let's be respectful to both artists and clients

to learn from. I just love them so much—they are amazing,” she enthuses.

Yoojin also loves to travel and in the past few months alone has done guest spots at some of the best studios in the US, including Megan Massacre's Grit N Glory in New York City and Kim Saigh and Shawn Barber's Memoir Tattoo in Los Angeles.

“I love tattooing and making art and, somehow, I have more people who like my art in the States and Canada,” she says. “I feel beyond happy and alive when I tattoo my art on people who love and understand it. The US is a big country and I'm trying to visit as many places as I can.”

She's also looking to go beyond North America. “I just started traveling the world to share my art, so I'm looking forward to visiting other countries in the future,” she adds. “I'm actually planning to visit London in May and some places in the EU.”

Asked to pick her favorite spot to date, she laughs, “Every tattoo shop I have worked at so far! Lucky for me, I have had the best experience at every shop. With good people and awesome clients, you can't go wrong.”

Yoojin On... Being LGBTQ Friendly

The LGBTQ community in South Korea faces legal challenges and discrimination. For example, same-sex marriage and civil unions are not recognised and conversion therapy is still quite prevalent. Speaking of why it was important for her to specify that she's 'LGBTQ friendly' in her Instagram bio, Yoojin explains, “It's still rare in Korea. Most of my friends are LGBTQ friendly, but there are still a lot of people who aren't.”

Brain Flavor

While many of today's artists choose to focus on one particular style, Yoojin is working on developing two distinct aesthetics in parallel. Describing her style simply as “Yoojin's style,” she specialises in both cute, colourful pieces, as well as more intricate black and grey work. She even runs two separate Instagram accounts to properly highlight each of her design styles: @stnratt for colourwork and @brain_flavor for blackwork.

“I get inspiration from everything, but mainly from me,” she elaborates. “So everything that I draw as a character is me in a different concept.” Pop culture plays a big role too and her portfolio is full of unique takes on famous individuals and characters, ranging from Frida Kahlo to Harley Quinn. She's also “a big fan of Harry Potter and Sailor Moon was everything when I was a kid.”

When she's not tattooing, Yoojin keeps busy “meeting up with my family and friends, eating good food, being in nature and listening to music.” It's that good food that she recommends you focus on if you get the chance to visit South Korea. “I always recommend to go to a local market because you will find some interesting stuff there,” she laughs. “Any local street market will do, but FOOD is what you've got to do most! And please try Korean fried chicken, if you eat meat, because it's the best.”

Looking ahead to the rest of 2019, she hopes to “make more tattoos, so I can make myself happy and make my clients happy. It will also be a busy year traveling and I want to expand my art in different concepts, like what I'm working on for @brain_flavor.”

All that's left to know now is who is Yoojin really? “Yoojin is a crazy girl doing her own thing with joy, so let me stay insane!”

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“We have a skill that no one can take from us, a skill that we can use to support our families, one that will last over time. That is what keeps me very positive; I really set out just to be a restaurant owner, I never would have thought that all of this would have come to me.”

-Chef Aarón Sánchez

Chef Aarón Sánchez has a way of stating an idea with such a passion that it sits with you, like a seed planted, eventually growing into an inspiration that you will harvest. Aarón called me during a break filming the television show he is currently working on, Gordon Ramsay’s Master Chef, where he has been a judge for the past few seasons. Aarón’s voice is immediately welcoming and comfortable, even during a hectic filming schedule. The longer I know him, the more I learn that this is Aarón, genuine and matter-of-fact. The first time I met Aarón Sánchez he immediately treated me like we were old friends, like we were cut from the same cloth. He brought his family by our Serpents of Bienville store, and after a short tour, he bestowed support as if we were a member of his family. He was the first person who made me feel like he understood what we were trying to do. Aarón will redirect the conversation in a way that makes it inclusive



to those around him. When speaking of his achievements, he will bring you to his level, making his achievement much more about the goals we can all accomplish, together. Aarón’s hand tattoo definitely feels appropriate, as it’s of the Mexican Revolutionary Emiliano Zapata.

When asked about the tattoo, Aarón says:

“I remember getting Zapata tattooed on my hand after having a dream about him. It felt like I had an opportunity to have a constant reminder of my heritage and also feel like a warrior. Getting that tattoo felt very soothing and also like I was preparing for battle.”

The battle Aarón has been preparing for is the challenge of living a genuine

life, paying homage to the giants whose shoulders we are standing on. Could Aarón be the positive revolutionary we all need?

Aarón’s foray into culinary traditions started with helping his mother with her successful restaurant. Being gen-



"YOU DON'T NEED A SILVER FORK TO EAT GOOD FOOD." — PAUL PRUDHOMME

uine and utilitarian were emphasised early in his family, with his earliest memory of his own cooking experience being enveloped in this. Aarón tells the story about learning his first dish from his grandmother, who they called Mema. She taught them how to make quesadillas, utilising the staples around the house—tortillas and cheese—and mixing them with the leftovers from the night before, using them as an “ultimate vehicle”. He recalls the incredible smells, how delicious it always was, but most importantly, how resourceful it was. From a young age, Aarón knew the importance of honouring and utilising the tools around him to create something unique and fresh every time. Aarón says, “I loved the idea of having my own culinary voice and style, my Mom always said that people should be able to taste my dishes with their eyes closed and know that it’s mine.”

When Aarón was sixteen, his mother sent him to work under the acclaimed Chef Paul Prudhomme in New Orleans, Louisiana. His work ethic was strengthened by Chef Prudhomme, putting an emphasis on not taking short cuts, having a comprehension of the details that can

make a dish something that does honour to the ingredients. This was also where Aaron’s personal style began to develop, along with his first foray into tattooing, after seeing the tattooed cooks on the line at Chef Prudhomme’s restaurant.

When speaking about New Orleans, Aarón says:

“Everything moves slower, and hospitality is taken incredibly seriously. Everyone seems to know everyone, so making sure that the dishes, flavours, service and the guest’s experiences are consistent is very important. When you are in New Orleans you are dealing with people that moved to the big city from very rural areas; a lot of them believe in voodoo, a lot of them believe in witchcraft, a lot of them believe in the pentecostal church, it’s a very interesting group of people that are very faith driven, but also very particular in those beliefs. I felt that was a very big contrasting part of being in New Orleans as opposed to New York. I loved that cool, sorta spiritual vibe from New Orleans and adopted that into New York when I got back up there. When I started coming of age, I went to New Orleans and started to fall in love with the



Tattoo by Michelle Myles



"PREFIERO MORIR DE PIE QUE VIVIR DE RODILLAS." (I'D RATHER DIE ON MY FEET, THAN LIVE ON MY KNEES.) – EMILIANO ZAPATA

whole Anthony Bourdain 'Kitchen Confidential'; it was at that time a very sub culture that ties directly into tattooing. With cooking, the only people I saw with tattoos were bikers and cooks. So I thought, 'this is pretty cool', I was entranced by the subculture of cooking and how it wasn't glorified at that time."

Many of us fell into tattooing with a similar story, one about the gateway of punk rock music, skateboarding, or other anti-authoritarian subcultures. Cooking was one of those subcultures, with many of the kitchens in big cities, like New York or London, being next door to tattoo shops and music venues.

A unique mind set is created in those passions and life styles, one that Aarón talks about, saying:

"I was always a very unbridled person, didn't want to listen to authority and cooking was a way of being like, hey, you know what? I can express myself, I can have fun, I can make a difference and I can be very extreme. That's why the tattooing attracted me initially."

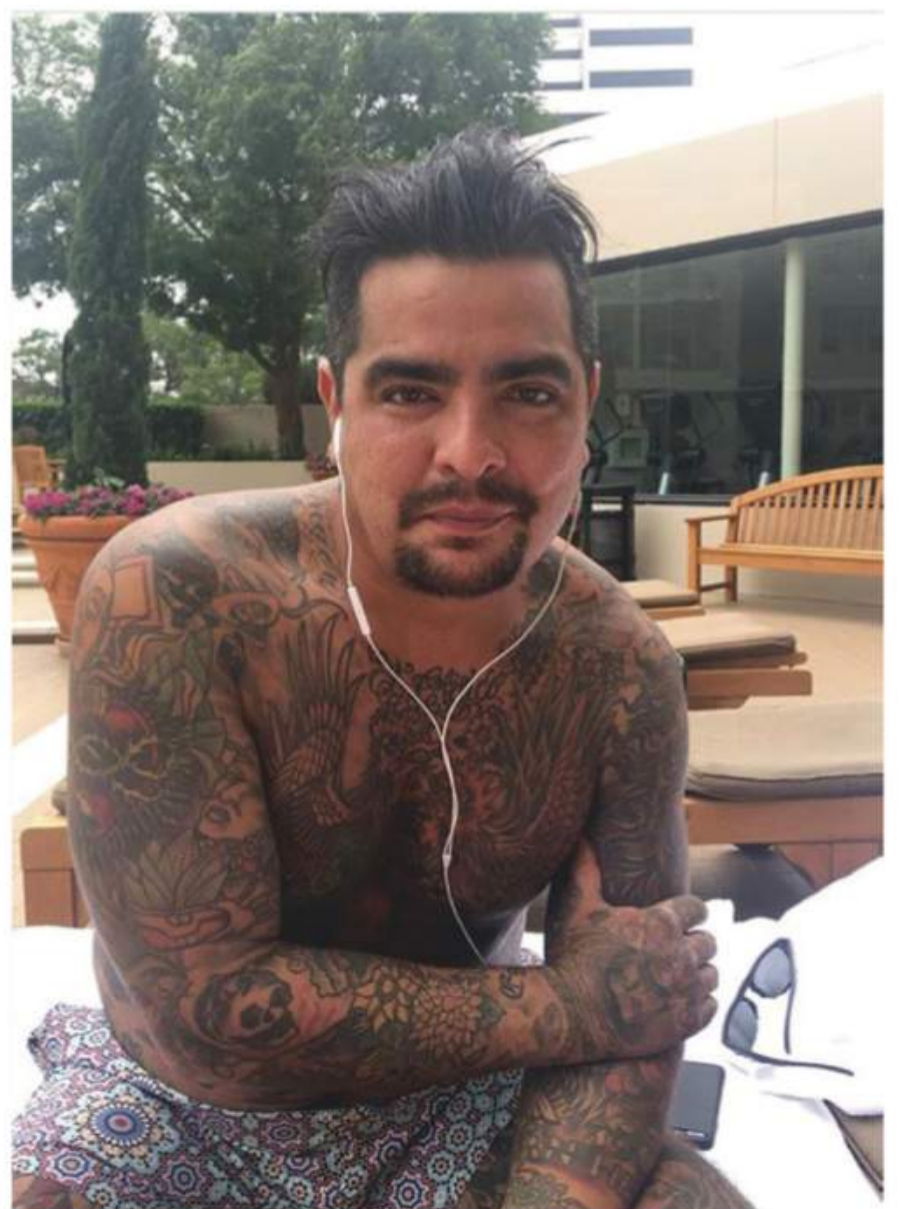
Aarón's cultural heritage is something that he holds incredibly close to his heart, with the first tattooed image he remembers seeing being the Virgin of Guadeloupe, an image that has been done countless ways, but to him it represented a tie to Mexico, an image paying homage to the land he loves.

Aarón began to find his own way unique road, saying:

"When I figured out that I didn't want to apply myself through academics and all the traditional routes, I thought, 'let me use this as an avenue (cooking)' and then I really fell in love with the idea of helping others, that's why I gravitated towards the idea of cooking, and then later on in my career it started to become significant

when it came to all the cultural undertones and being able to pay homage to where I'm from."

The culinary world and the tattoo world are far more similar than one would think from the outside looking in. Aarón explains about the similarity that both groups are filled with artistically inclined people that are, at the





Tattoo by Brad Fink



Aarón Sánchez and Sean Herman

same time, completely misunderstood. For many, this leads to depression and substance abuse, so they find refuge in either tattooing or cooking, enveloping their lives.

Aarón found something interesting when he met tattooist Michelle Myles though, recalling, “Michelle was straight edge, I liked the extreme of that; you are a bad ass tattooer, looking like you could rip somebody’s throat out, and you go and have a kombucha in the back.”

Aarón met Michelle in 1996, and later started getting tattooed by her in 1997. Aarón was working hard at his first restaurant, the award winning L-Ray, and later opening Paladar which was next door to Michelle’s shop, Daredevil, that she co-owns with Brad Fink. Aarón found inspiration in Daredevil, during a time when the culinary world was starting to expand with the start of the Food Network and what would become the celebrity chef craze. Paladar quickly gained attention, garnering many awards, further solidifying Aaron’s impact on the culinary world, and creating a future he would never have expected.

In my years tattooing, I have been fortunate to meet a large number of people who get tattooed, and people who give tattoos. Within that group I have met an even smaller amount of people that I refer to as “people with a heart for tattooing”. Without question, you know who these people are the second they start speaking about the art of tattooing. Tattooists like Lindsey Carmichael, Justin Weatherholtz, and Krooked Ken all serve an inspiration to me for this heart, and I would include Chef Aarón Sánchez as one of those people. As his career grew, so did his relationship with tattooing, and his love for the

craft and rich cultural history. While working at Paladar, Aarón became good friends with Michelle Myles and Brad Fink. They began to trade dishes for tattoos, and a friendship was cultivated. Aarón found himself in a position where he could invest in his friends, and that is what he did with Daredevil. Aaron’s respect for tattooing is so immense that he has a hard time verbalising his tie with Daredevil, emphasising that his position is stepped back in the financial side of the business. His admiration for the pair is immense, referring to Brad Fink as a “legend in the business” (which he definitely is). Aarón refers to Daredevil as feeling like his “home” when he goes there, further stating, “Seeing the creativity and expertise that they emanate always inspires me to work on my craft.”

There are many schools of thought in tattooing, and one I am personally attracted to is the idea of creating a piece as well as an overall experience for the person





Tattoo by Michelle Myles

getting tattooed. I had the pleasure of interviewing my friend, tattooist Krooked Ken, years ago and he told me a story about the legendary Philadelphia Eddie. Ken said:

“I remember stopping in his shop and Eddie was there. This couple came in, they didn’t want to get tattooed, it was the novelty, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun if we went in there’ and Eddie was like ‘We’ll put a beautiful tattoo on you, you’re already a beautiful woman, probably the most beautiful woman that’s ever been in this shop, but this really would top it off.’ So she got tattooed. Nobody does that anymore.”

I love that idea of breaking down barriers and creating something that is for a person to experience, not something that is about the person creating it. Aarón talks about his similar inspiration from Daredevil:

“What’s really great about what Michelle does at the shop is to give these people what they want. A lot of people, like chefs, will fall on the sword because they say, ‘I’m not going to cook that, I’m not going to make that, I’m a chef and this is what I’m gonna make.’ Then they have an empty restaurant; the guy next to them is making sliders and calamari and they are packed. I think as a tattooer you have to be smart like that too, not saying ‘I don’t do tribal,’ ‘I don’t do this.’ Well, that pays the bills buddy, so,

you have to have that attitude. Do I really want to do a wizard on your back? Yes.”

“At the restaurant, give people what they want, don’t put your needs ahead of someone else. You have a job to do, and you have to come to grips with that. That’s extremely important, that’s how I want it to be with the public.”

A quote from my friend Famous Gabe comes to mind, and it fits both worlds: “I don’t care about fame, I don’t have to be the best, I just want to give the working class person the tattoo they want and to make it my best.” I think this transcends into every craft, but especially in the culinary world.

Next month we are going to continue our conversation with Chef Aarón Sánchez. We will touch on his ties as a cultural ambassador to his Mexican heritage, including the Aarón Sánchez Scholarship Fund; along with Daredevil’s growth, venturing into a tattoo museum focused on maintaining the history of tattooing in their New York area. We will also explore Aaron’s life behind the camera and what keeps him focused while filming a show that became an international sensation.

Make sure to pick up next month’s Skin Deep to learn more. ▣



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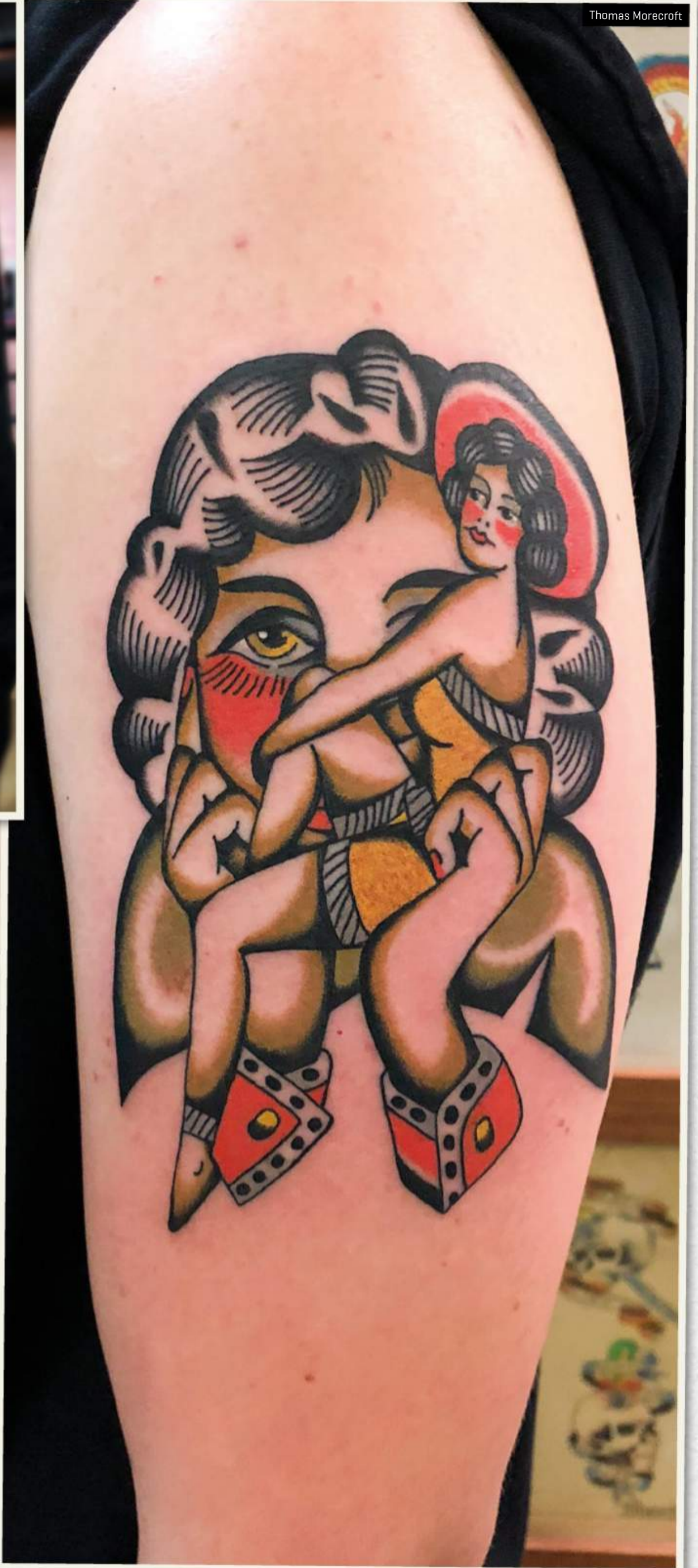
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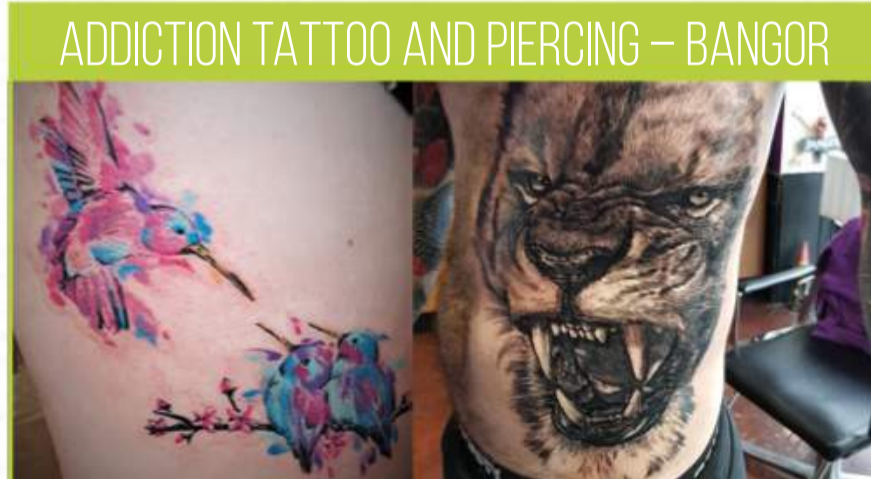
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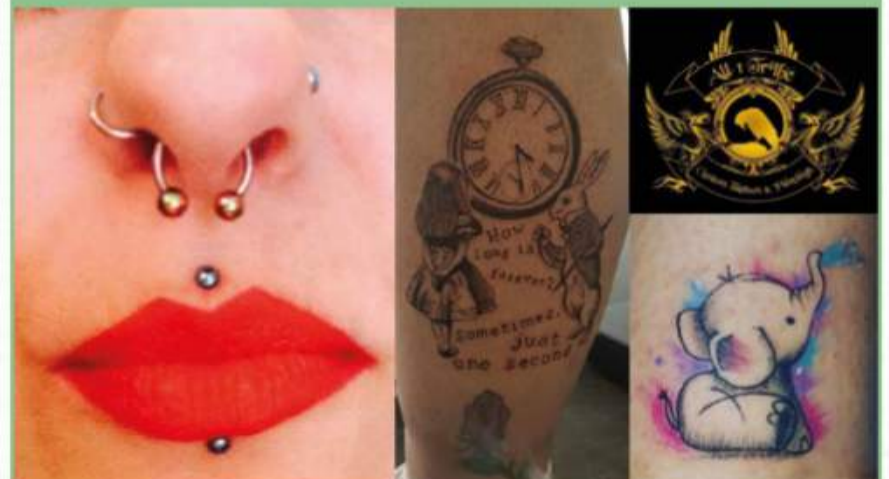


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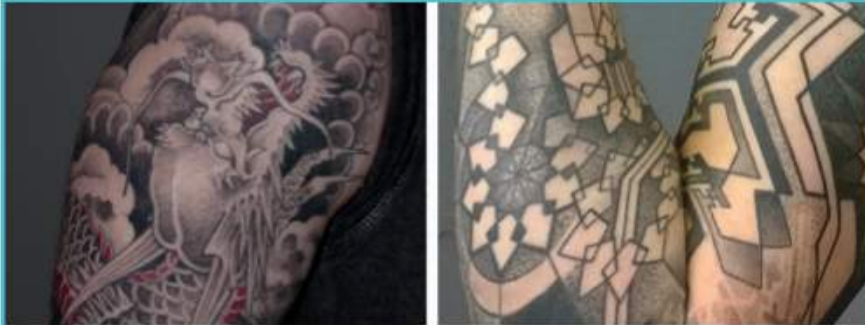
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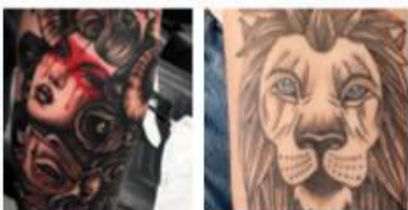
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by Kevin Ray



Not so much ‘tattoo of the month’, but many.

Browsing through the portfolio of Kevin Ray, it’s hard to pick out a single tattoo without picking something else a second later. Personally speaking, colour tattoos are not normally my kind of thing but damn... everything about each tattoo of his I look at, are – in a word – wonderful.

They know the limitations of what they’re supposed to be and within a relatively small space, create magic.

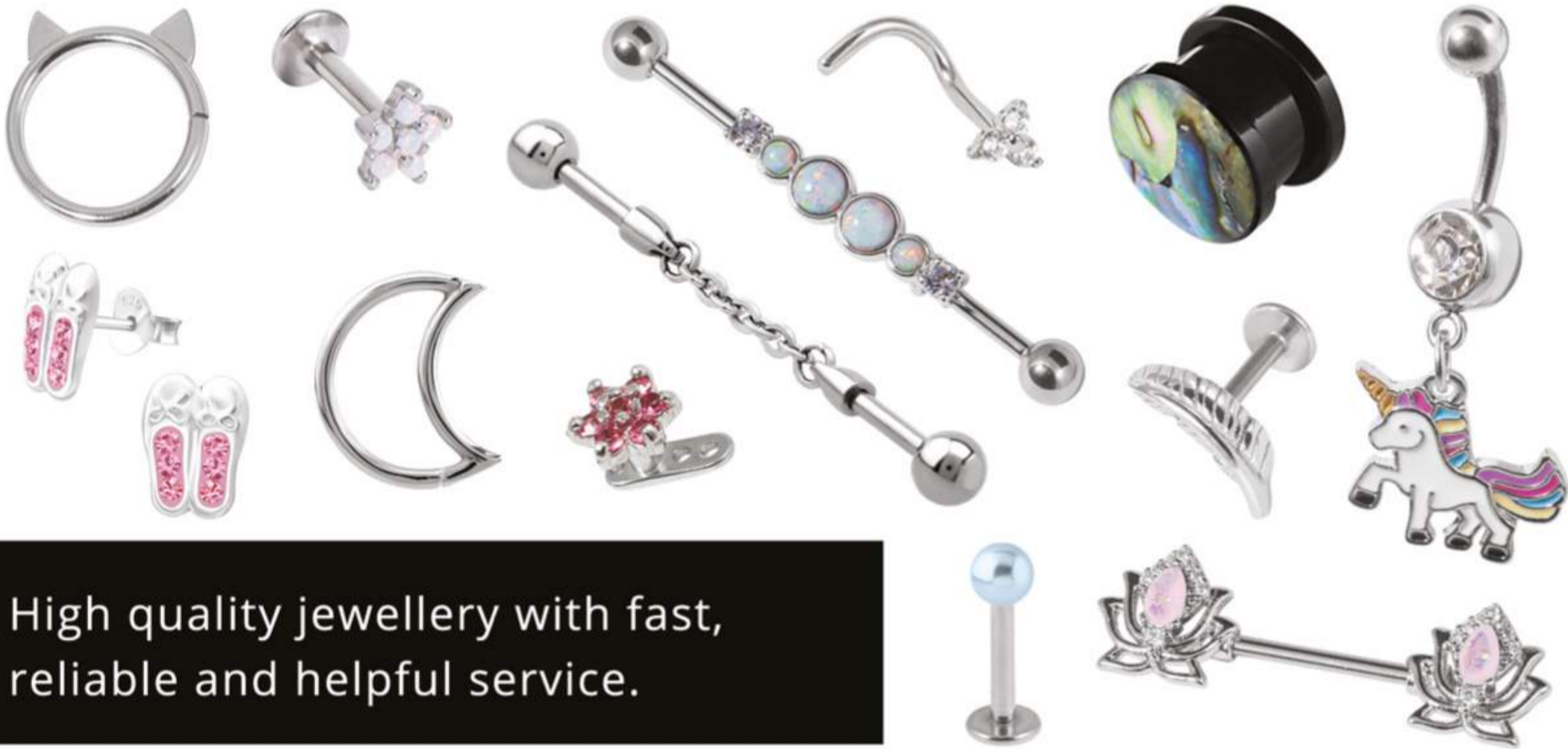
The colours are superbly thought out, the circles are as circular as they’re supposed to be and most amazing of all, within a palm sized space, there’s not a scrap of detail left out of what’s supposed to be there. These small tattoos say everything they ever need to in a single glance.

Ultra-clean, very clever and most of all, executed to within an inch of their life. Some of the finest examples of modern tattooing I have seen in a long time.

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