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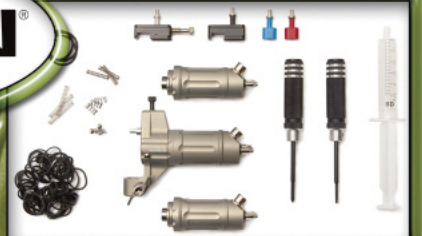


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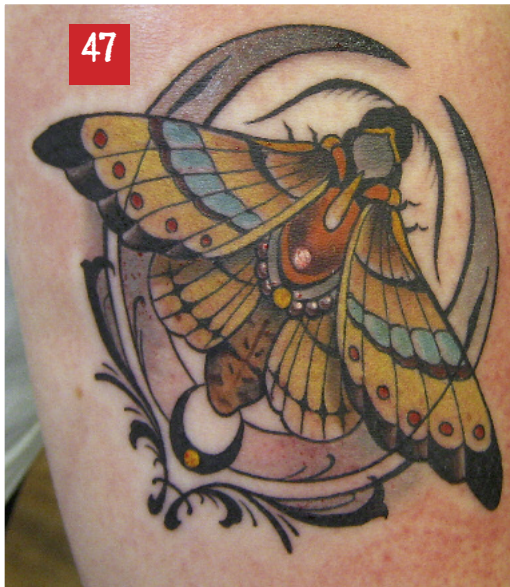
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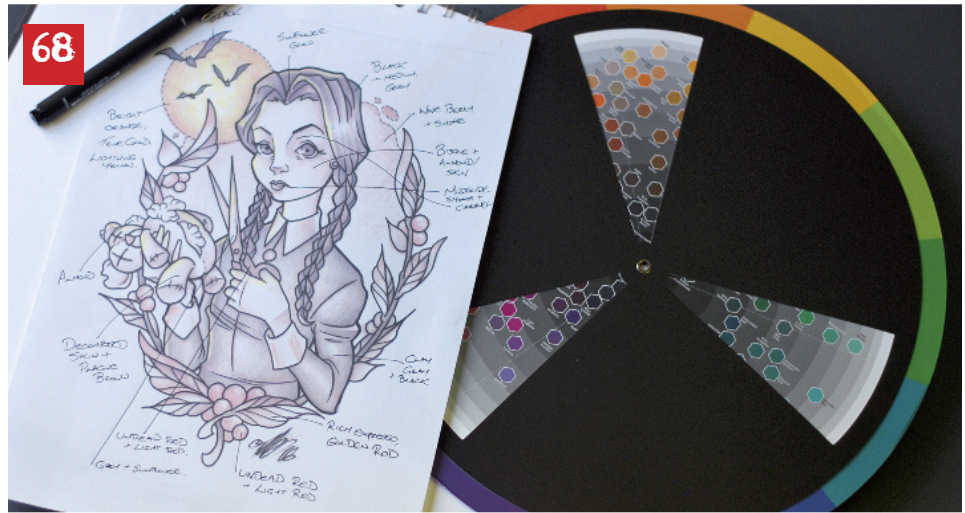
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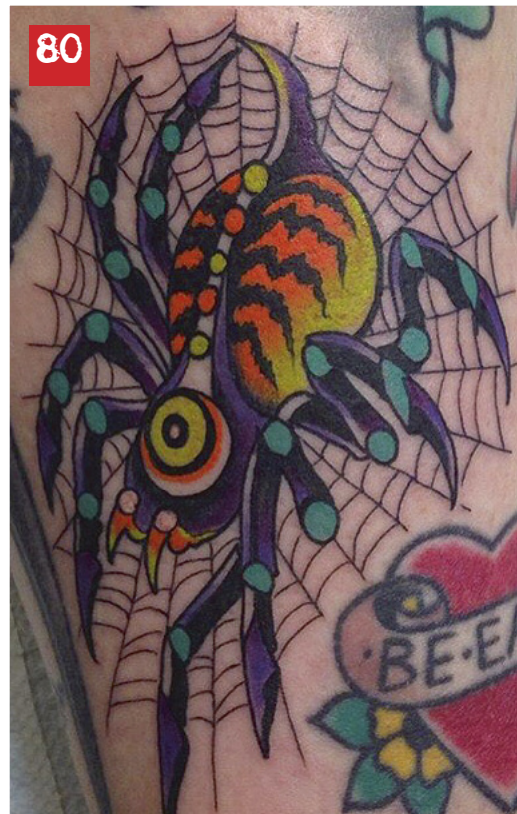
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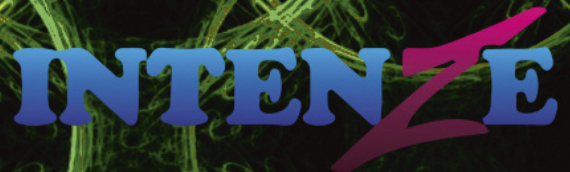
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WELCOME to 146

Blimey, it seemed like it was just yesterday when summer was here, and only last week that I was welcoming 2016 in. Is it me, or does time really go faster the older you get?

Those amongst us with long memories (or, who are in fact just old) can remember a time before the Internet and the mobile phone. A time when the printed word was king and libraries were the palaces of reference and knowledge. Things took a little longer and time went a little slower, but somehow achievements held more gratification.

The invention of the Internet held promise of 'The information super highway'. At the time, we were led to believe that we would have a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips and uncensored access to all truths, unmanipulated by 'The Man'.

And, to an extent, it has partially delivered. It allows us to connect with people all over the world, see things that we may not have been able to, and develop a whole new way of learning. As I write this now, I'm listening to music via a popular video sharing site, and receiving emails from America. In that sense, it really has revolutionised our lives.

However, as time has gone on I can't help feeling that somehow we're being manipulated and slowly becoming slaves to it. Tailored adverts pop up mid-tune, based on my internet searches from months ago, and the side bar of my home page is based on what I've previously browsed online. It feels like we're being monitored and in turn, things are being sold back to us; as if our screen is no longer a window to the world but in fact just another a shop window and a method to sell.

The desire for instant gratification that comes from this fast paced lifestyle is leading to an inability to remain focused. Even as I type I hear the familiar 'ping' of an incoming email and have to fight the urge to rush away and see what important information awaits only to find it is another advert for erectile dysfunction (I don't remember searching for that one!)

When it comes to the tattoo world, the Internet has leveled the playing field, giving everyone access to the same reference material. But, in doing this it has also somehow flattened it taking away the need to dig a little deeper to find and create that original killer image. Before the Internet, finding information that gave your design validity somehow gave your tattoos a slight edge.

Of course there are always two sides to every coin. I recently conducted an interview with the tattooist Willy G, an artist I first discovered online. I always come away from interviews feeling really inspired, but there was something about this one that really left its mark on me. Willy is, by far, one of the most positive people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. He's a true optimist, and has no time for negativity. There was something about his words that really hit me; life really is too short to focus on the bad stuff.

Maybe from time to time we need to turn off the Internet, put down the mobile phone, step away from the computer, focus on the positives and really make the most of what truly matters. I'm lucky enough to have a job that I love, a family that I love and a roof over my head. When you are fortunate to have positivity in your life, that's definitely worth slowing down for.



Perry

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The Internet is so big, so powerful and pointless that for some people it is a complete substitute for life.

Andrew Brown

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NEWS & REVIEWS

Tattoo news and reviews for your delectation and delight. If it goes on in the tattoo world, it goes in here. Send us your news items, books or products for review and items of general curiosity and intrigue for the tattoo cognoscenti.

News, Total Tattoo Magazine, 111 Furze Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR7 0AU

BOOK REVIEW

Ade: Japanese Sketches 2

Hardcover, embossed linen spine, 175 pages
£60.00

Available from
www.gentlemanstatooflash.com



Ade is one of the best Western Japanese tattooists in the UK and he describes this book as "a snapshot of my drive to better understand the complexities of traditional Japanese tattooing". Look inside, and you'll find page after page filled with incredible sketches, paintings and other material gathered from the past few years. What's really interesting is the way the subtle lines and curves of the studies allow us to see how Ade builds up his drawings, and why they look so dynamic. For any fan of Japanese tattooing and imagery, this really is a feast for the eyes. And the thing that surprised all of us here in the Total Tattoo office was the price! Sixty pounds is an absolute bargain for such a plethora of images, so beautifully put together. This is a high quality book and we can see it being sold out very soon.



Free burgers anyone?



Do you love burgers enough to have them tattooed on your body? If so, you could be in luck because Australian burger chain Café 51 has announced they will give free burgers for life to selected customers who get a tattoo of a burger from their menu. There are a few conditions of course. You must be over 18 years of age. The tattoo can be anywhere on your body (provided you can show it on demand to store staff...) and the tattooed burger must be life-sized and incorporate the company logo. Oh – and the offer is limited to one burger per person per day. If you would like to apply to be part of this promotional campaign, head to www.cafe51.com.au/freeburgerforlife

New Tattoo Academy



We were recently contacted by the team at Marked For Life, who told us their exciting plans to open a Tattoo Academy. New for 2017, the tattoo academy will be offering higher education (both practical and theory) within tattooing, art and design. Seminars already announced include painting techniques with Oddboy, and portrait techniques with Mark Bester and Jordan Croke. For more information, take a look at their facebook page www.facebook.com/TheTattooAcademy or email TheTattooAcademy@gmail.com

Looking for guest spots!



Te Rangitu Netana is a traditional Maori tattoo artist from New Zealand with over 25 years experience in the art of Ta Moko. He uses both modern machines and traditional hand tools. He has recently moved over to the UK and is looking for regular guest spots at tattoo shops around the southeast of England. He would also consider one-off guest spots in other areas. You can email Te Rangitu on terangitunetanatamoko@gmail.com His website is not yet live, but his facebook page is **Te Rangitu Netana Ta Moko** and his instagram is **@terangitu**

WIN SAILOR JERRY RUM!

Earlier this year, Sailor Jerry announced that they would be releasing a series of four collectable flash art bottle wraps throughout 2016. The final two designs are now available (RRP £20) – the Eagle symbolising America, honour, prowess and intelligence, and The Navy Girl historically representing the ideal of extreme femininity (one of Norman ‘Sailor Jerry’ Collins’s most iconic designs). The wonderful team at Sailor Jerry have once again donated ten of these special bottles for lucky Total Tattoo readers to win – perfect timing for the upcoming holiday season! To be in with a chance of winning, all you need to do is answer the following question:

How many limited edition bottle wraps did Sailor Jerry Rum release throughout 2016?

- A) 2
- B) 4
- C) 6

Email comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with your answer and the subject line RUM. The first ten correct entries drawn out of the hat will each receive a bottle of rum, featuring one of the new designs. Closing date 9th December and you must be 18 or over to enter. Terms and conditions apply (see page 5). As well as their famous spiced rum, the Sailor Jerry brand also includes a line of Americana clothing and accessories. Check out www.sailorjerry.com/en-gb



MEDICAL DEVELOPMENTS

We've read some interesting news reports about temporary tattoos that slowly release drugs into the body that could soon be available to help those with auto-immune conditions such as multiple sclerosis. Tests have shown that this could be a much more effective drug delivery method than traditional injections. How does it work? Well the tattoo 'ink' contains carbon-based nanoparticles which are designed to inhibit the action of the rogue T-cells that are attacking healthy tissue by mistake. It's a much more targeted treatment than the broad-spectrum immunosuppressants currently used. The 'ink' gradually fades over the course of about a week, but the skin remains marked... so, with imagination, this new drug delivery method could also be made into body art.

TICKETS ON SALE

Plans are coming together for our first tattoo convention at the Metro Radio Arena, Newcastle Upon Tyne in April next year. Advance tickets have gone on sale and are priced at just £12 for a day and £21 for the weekend and are available from www.facebook.com/bignorthtattooshow

Where you will find constantly updated information about who else is coming to join the party!



ARTIST VACANCIES

Follow Your Dreams Tattoo are looking for a full- or part-time artist. This is for someone professional, motivated and hard-working, and it's not an apprenticeship. Email tachotattoo@yahoo.com

True 'Til Death are looking to expand their team by taking on another experienced artist. Minimum 3 years experience required, and own client base essential. Email your CV and portfolio to truetildeathtattoo@yahoo.com

Needle And Fred are looking for an accomplished artist to join their busy studio. The ideal candidate must have at least 3 years of studio experience and be drama-, drug- and ego-free! A strong portfolio is required. Email examples of your work and a covering letter to needleandfred@live.co.uk or call 01903 733622.

King Street Collective are looking to recruit a full-time studio manager. The successful candidate will have strong leadership skills with experience in customer service and administration. Duties will include cleaning the studio, and the ideal person mustn't be afraid to get their hands dirty! Piercing experience is preferred, but not essential. Email your CV and a covering letter to kingstreetcollective@gmail.com

Hand On Heart Tattoo Studio are on the lookout for a new artist to start immediately, with excellent rates. The lively studio is busy, with bookings well into February 2017. The ideal candidate will be well-rounded in style and prepared to take on the overflow from other artists as well as doing walk-in trade. Message the shop via their facebook page www.facebook.com/handonhearttattoostudio



SAIRA'S NEW VENTURE

Saira Hunjan is known as one of the best UK female tattooists. In a new collaboration with luxury brand Tod's, she has designed five artworks (featuring the brand's mythical lion-headed beast) for top-of-the-range traditionally crafted messenger bags. Limited edition wallets and bags featuring laser prints of Saira's drawings will also be on sale. For stockists and availability, check out www.tods.com

R.I.P. Eli Falconette

We were shocked to hear of the recent death of American tattooist Eli Falconette. Eli was the owner of Rose and Dagger Tattoo in Portland, Oregon, which he opened in 2015.

He had a true love of traditional American tattooing, evident in all his work, and was also known for 'The Great Unknown' tattoo book, which he once described as "...for everyone that is pushing the limits everyday with respect to the old ways."

After tattooing, his other loves were his bulldogs and cars. A good man with a huge heart,

Eli was a great listener who was always there to support and advise.

His mantra was PMA – Positive Mental Attitude – and he was a warm, friendly man who genuinely seemed interested in what you had to say. The tattoo world has lost an incredible friend and soul, and our condolences go out to Eli's family and all those who knew him.

Eli's shop has started a fundraising page to help support the studio that he worked so hard to set up.

If you would like to make a donation, please head to:

www.gofundme.com/rose-dagger



DVD REVIEW

The Paul Sayce Interviews

Region Free DVD

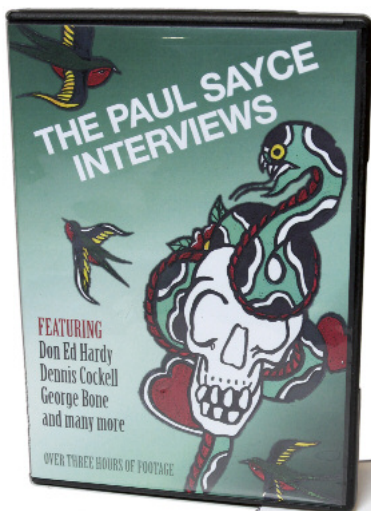
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Available from

www.paulsaycefilms.bigcartel.com

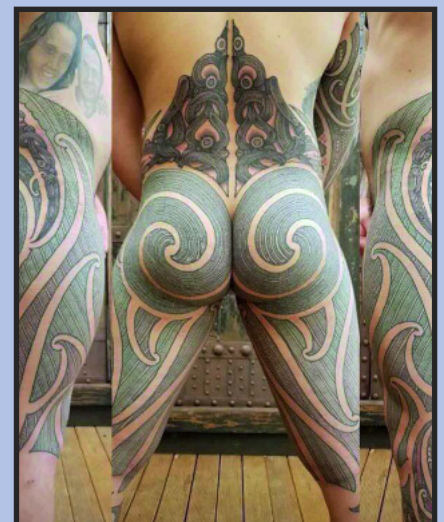
Tattooing's rich history has shaped the craft we know and love today. This is why it's imperative that these tales are documented and preserved. Step forward Paul Sayce, who

has independently produced this amazing DVD, filled with over three hours of tattoo interviews conducted in 2015 and 2016. The interviews feature some of the best tattooists from the 1960s and 70s, including Don Ed Hardy, Dennis Cockell, George Bone, Lal Hardy and Trevor Lee Ewald to name but a few. Paul Sayce both loves and respects the history of tattooing and this comes across in his questions. Equally, there's a deep respect and admiration for the tattooists being interviewed. There's real passion in this film. Whether you're new to the world of tattooing or a well-covered collector, this DVD is an essential in your collection. It's fascinating, and it's an important document in the all too easily lost history of 'old school' tattooing.



A BUM MOVE FOR FACEBOOK

We read in the news that Facebook was recently obliged to apologise to a traditional Maori artist after removing a video of his work, and temporarily banning him, because the featured tattoo was deemed sexually explicit. Hirini Katene, who works at House of Natives in Auckland, posted a video of his client's *pūhoro*, a traditional tattoo covering the lower back, buttocks and legs. Not only is this kind of tattoo a work of art; it is culturally important, reflecting the client's lineage and life story, and worthy of deep respect.



WIN TICKETS TO CARIAD INK!

Cariad Ink returns for its 5th anniversary show on 3rd and 4th December at Venue Cymru, Llandudno. Featuring burlesque, stalls, piercing, magicians and even activities for children, this convention is perfect for all ages, just before Christmas! The organisers have kindly given us a pair of free weekend passes for two lucky people. To be in with a chance of winning, just tell us...

Which major holiday event occurs in December?

- A) Christmas
- B) Easter
- C) Independence Day

Email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with CARIAD as the subject line. Closing date 30th November. Terms and conditions apply (see p5).



NEW STUDIO

Kevin Paul has announced the opening of the R and R Laser Clinic in Melbourne, near Derby. It's a new studio with the specific aim of helping people who are struggling with mental and physical issues around tattoos, and it's all about boosting customers' self-esteem. In addition to meeting the rapidly rising demand for cover-ups and re-works of tattoos that people regret, the studio will also cater to the particular needs of those who have problems with scars. They can be found at: 2 Russell Yard, Derby Road, DE73 8DZ Melbourne. Tel: 01332 986320



R.I.P. 'Crazy Philadelphia Eddie'

Some people die never knowing if they ever truly lived life to the full. One man who certainly lived the life he wanted to was Eddie Funk, known to the tattoo world as 'Crazy Philadelphia Eddie'.

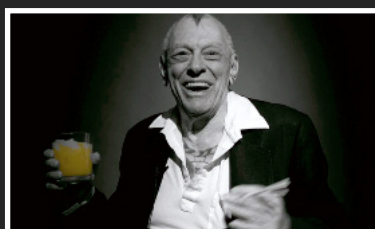
Edward Funk was born in Astoria, in the New York borough of Queens, on August 22nd 1936 and grew up to become a storyteller, a showman and without doubt one of the greatest tattooing icons the profession has ever seen. A man known the world over, who would have his photo taken with anyone, he always had a smile on his face and a screwdriver in his hand (the drink, not the tool!) Whenever you were in his company, his tattoo tales would keep you entertained and take you on a glorious trip into tattoo history.

Eddie learned to tattoo with Max Pelz in Coney Island after receiving his first tattoos from him in 1952. It wasn't long before he was up to speed and good enough to branch out on his own. He went on to open a studio at the Rockaway Playland in Irish Town, Queens, before moving on to Manhattan at 48th Street. At the time, he was also meeting some of the all time greats of the tattooing era including Jack Dracula, Coney Island Freddy and the Moskowitz brothers. In the 1960s Eddie left the city and travelled, tattooing in Chicago, Hawaii and worldwide. He went on to found his own supply company, a tattoo museum, the National tattoo Club of America (now known as the National Tattoo Club) and the Annual Philadelphia Tattoo Arts Festival.

Eddie was always there for others and that is why he was well and truly loved. He was like a magnet; he drew people in and he knew how to make people happy. He was a lover of life, and even when facing death he didn't take anything too seriously. He didn't believe in funerals and made it clear that he did not want any form of service when he passed. He said that if people wanted to remember him, they should quit smoking and go and feed some ducks. He died at 9:25am on October 8th. The cause of death is still unknown, but over the last few years Eddie suffered from respiratory problems (possibly emphysema).

So there you have it, a few short words on a tattooing icon. All I will say now is Goodbye Eddie, it was great knowing you. Thanks for loving life and loving tattooing as much as I loved you. I will go and feed some ducks, my friend.

Paul Sayce



Pete

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One of the things that makes tattooing such a special artform is the relationship between the artist who creates the tattoo and the client, the living canvas, who receives it.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Shigenori Iwasaki (better known simply as Shige) of Yellow Blaze in Yokohama. He has achieved a truly stratospheric level of fame, producing timeless Japanese masterpieces that are coveted the world over.

Receiving a tattoo from him is an intense experience, and in this interview he shares some of his personal thoughts on the process. He also tells us about a surprising switch in his working practices...



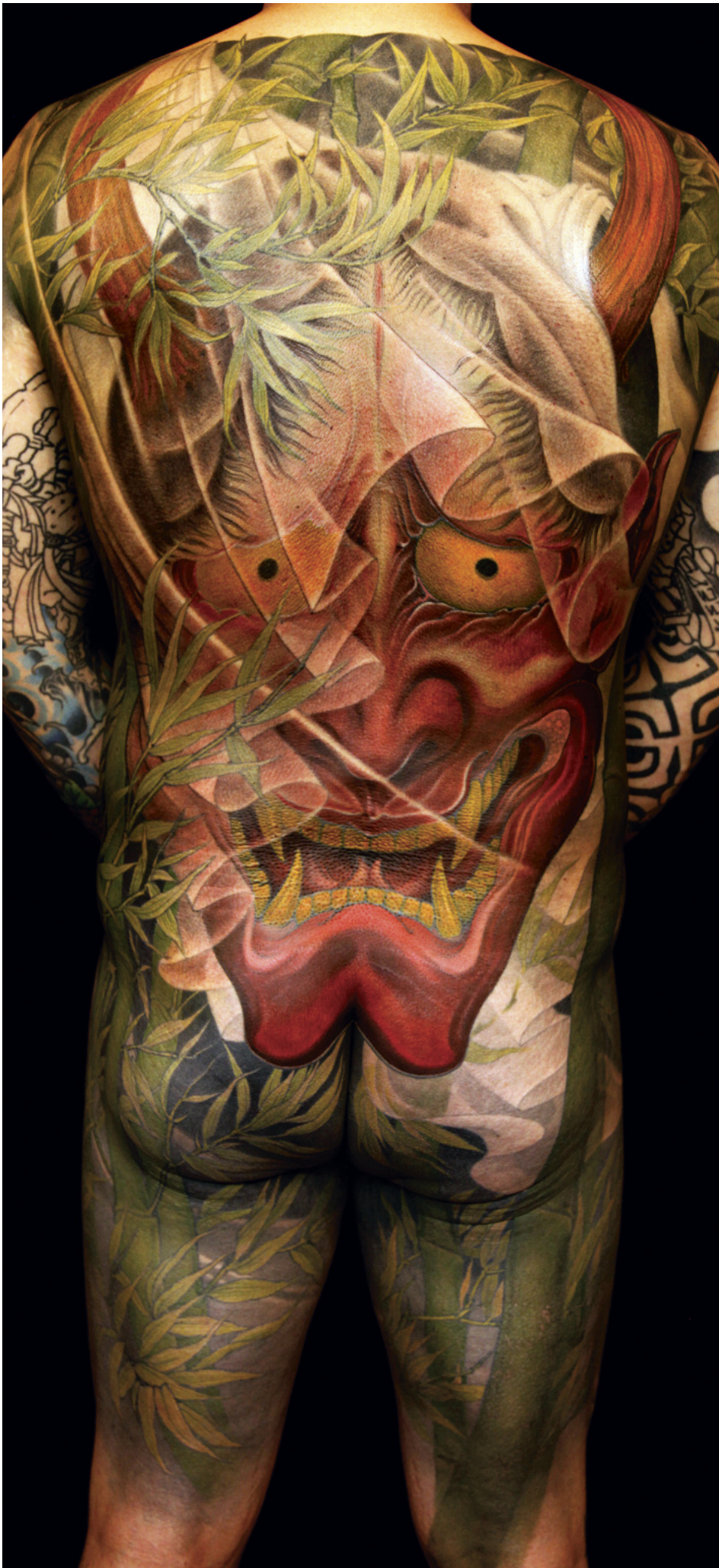
Words by Travellin' Mick
Pictures by Travellin' Mick and Shige



Travellin' Mick: Shige-san, there must be so many people who want to get tattooed by you, either at your studio in Japan or at a convention. Do you have a system for selecting your clients?

Shige: Before I answer that, we have to talk about what a tattoo really is. I am not just transferring a piece of art on to the skin of my client; I am filling it with meaning, and it has to be matched to the client's character and personality. This is the absolute core of my tattooing philosophy.





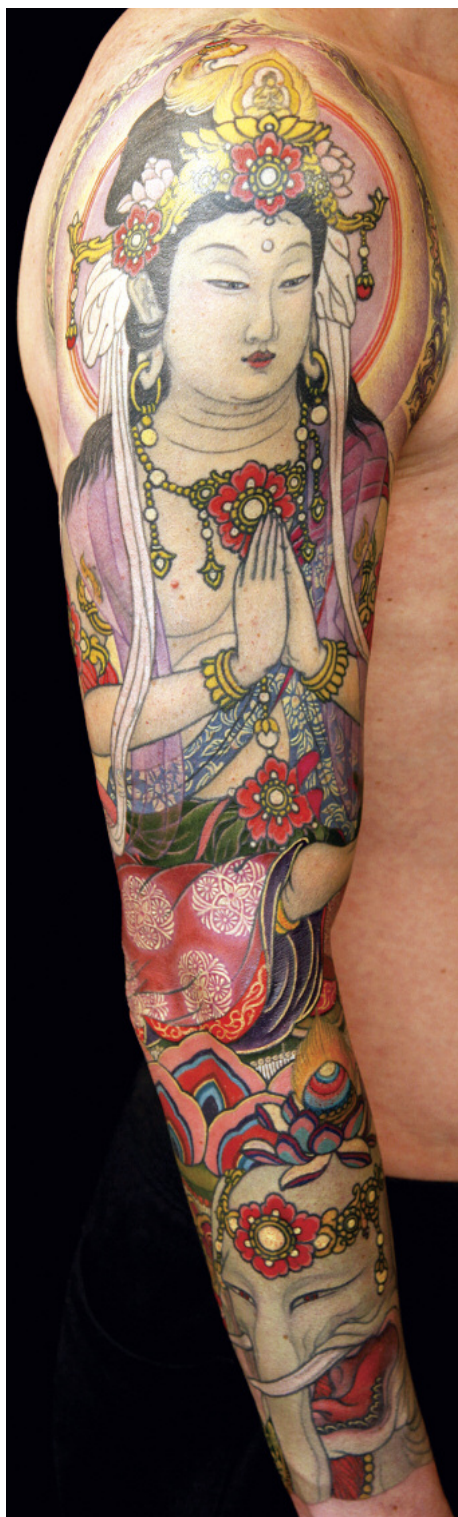
Travellin' Mick: So any client who wants to get tattooed by you should be ready for an intense period of preparation?

Shige: Yes. Once we've established that the client is serious about getting a large piece that might require many sessions (and therefore lots of trips to Japan) we usually invite him or her to a personal interview. This could take an entire afternoon, or perhaps even longer. We will then decide on a subject or a broad theme for the tattoo, and I will start drawing the piece. Next time I see the client, I will try to get all the lines on the body. The shading and colour come later on...



Travellin' Mick: The whole process is probably best described as a journey. I have spoken to many of your clients who, after years of diligently travelling to Japan for numerous sessions with you, talk about it as a life-changing experience. Can you tell us more about your approach to the art itself? Somewhat unusually in Japanese tattooing, you didn't have a master who you had to follow. You developed your own work. You're a keeper of an ancient tradition as well as a 21st century master of the art.

Shige: Keeping the tradition is definitely important, but I am happy to play with the old rules – always respectfully of course, without harming the underlying principles. Mind you, it takes a lifetime of study to acquire enough knowledge to be able to do this.

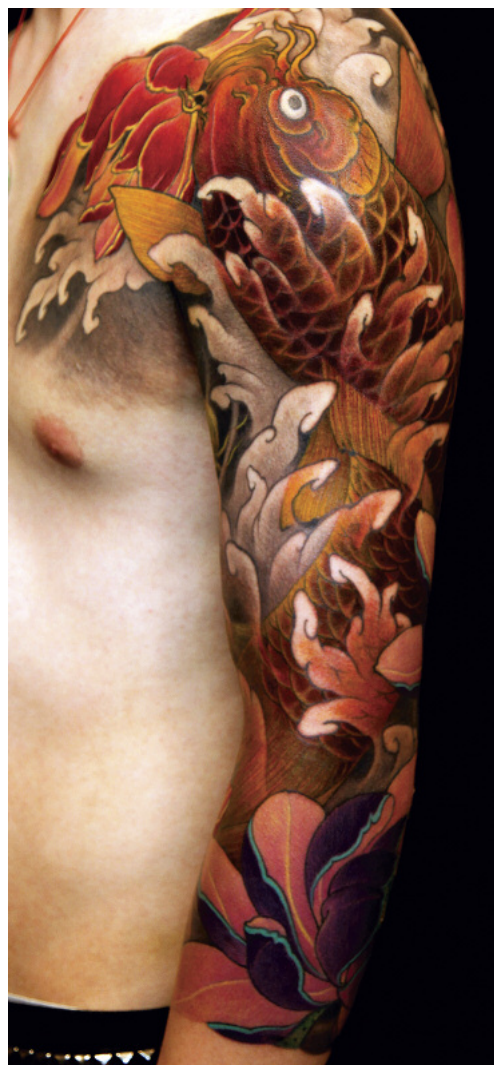


Travellin' Mick: As Picasso said, “Learn the rules like a professional, so you can break them like an artist...”

Shige: Correct. Basically, there are three categories of Japanese art. Firstly, there is Beauty. This is expressed by flowers such as peonies and chrysanthemums, as well as certain birds, and so on. The themes are mainly decorative and do not feature very often in my personal tattoo style. Secondly, there is Storytelling – the warriors, the monks, the epic battles, and all the legends that exist in their infinite variations, like the one about the Hannya and fantastic shape-changing characters such as Kiyohime and Kitsune. Many of the stories – particularly those about key events in Japanese history – contain educational messages about our ideals and philosophies played out by characters that really existed. I add my own imagination to those stories, and try to fill the images with meaning and symbolism, often reflecting the client's own personal traits. The third aspect of Japanese art, and by far the deepest, is Religion – which is also the most important one if you want to understand my approach to tattooing. I am talking about Buddhist art, with all its multi-layered symbolism. Nobody can finish studying all of this in a single lifetime, but it's certainly rewarding to try!

Travellin' Mick: Now a more technical question. After twenty years of tattooing with standard coil machines, you caused a bit of a stir by switching to rotaries...

Shige: Yes. I have tried endless machines, mostly coil, and encountered many great ones. I used to be a mechanic [for Harley-Davidson in Yokohama] and I love to work with my hands. Until a year ago, I even made my own needles – every single one of them. But now I've switched to using the Cheyenne PEN. I like it because it's very light, and being so quiet it minimises the stress for the client. Even though it's a rotary, you can use it just like a coil machine. The beauty is that you only need to have one of them. You simply click in the needles you need.





Travellin' Mick: What difference has it made to your work?

Shige: It's the hand of the artist that does the tattoo. It can adjust to any machine. But you can make life easier for yourself and your client with the equipment that you choose. If you look at old photos from nineteenth century Japan, you'll see the great work done by *tebori* artists back then. They were just using needles and ink, right? All by hand. Machines came along later, but all they did was speed up the process of tattooing. Using my cartridge machine, I can gain one and a half hours per day for my art, because it makes me so much more efficient. And most of my clients prefer it too. I knew I'd be addicted to it from the moment I first tried it, and I know I won't change back. But it's definitely not for beginners. The PEN is really strong, so if you are not able to control it you are in danger of ripping your client's skin. You have to be careful. Coil machines usually have a little bit of give, and they need to be adjusted quite often; a rotary machine has no give in it, so it creates a direct connection between your hand and the client's skin. You have to get used to this. It's more like *tebori!*

Travellin' Mick: Shige-san, thank you very much for this insight into your work.

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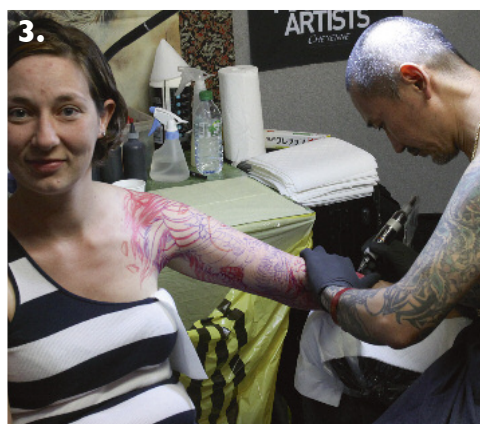
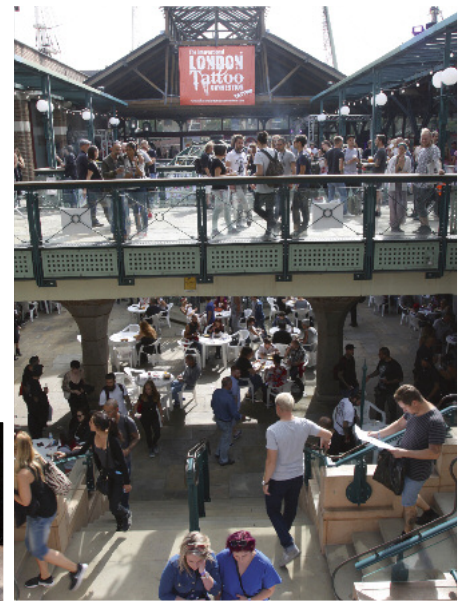


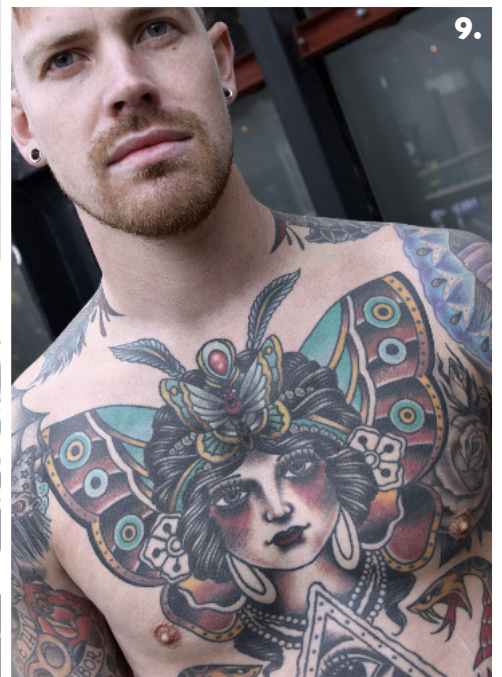
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INTERNATIONAL LONDON TATTOO CONVENTION

It's almost impossible to introduce the International London Tattoo Convention in words. As I write this, my mind is racing at 100 mph, thinking back on the sights, sounds and experiences of the weekend. I'm sure if you have been before, you will know exactly what I'm talking about.

The International London Tattoo Convention is now firmly rooted in East London, at Tobacco Dock. It's a really fantastic venue for a convention, packed with interesting features that really add to the atmosphere. Over 300 tattooists are situated in rooms over two floors, along with the traders, exhibitions, bars and stages. Luckily, free maps are provided to ensure that you don't miss a single thing. In other venues, separate rooms may not work so well, but the sheer size of Tobacco Dock means that you can weave in and out of the crowds.





- 1 & 4. damian gorski, ushuaia tattoo
- 2. zhanshan li, zhanshan tattoo (china)
- 3. shige, working
- 5. diau bo, diau an tattoo (taiwan)
- 6. dr pepper (greece)
- 7. christian boye larsen, timeless art (denmark)
- 8. jo harrison working
- 9. jerry olddog, lucky 7 (norway)



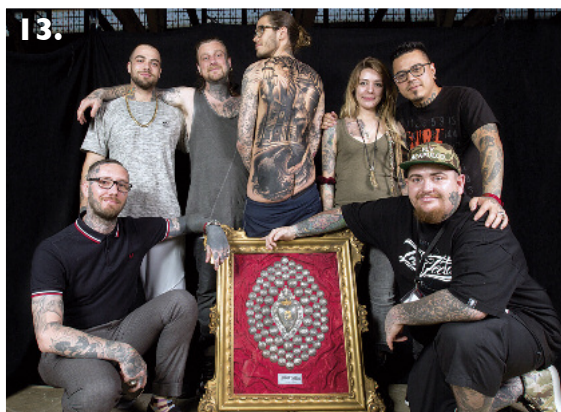
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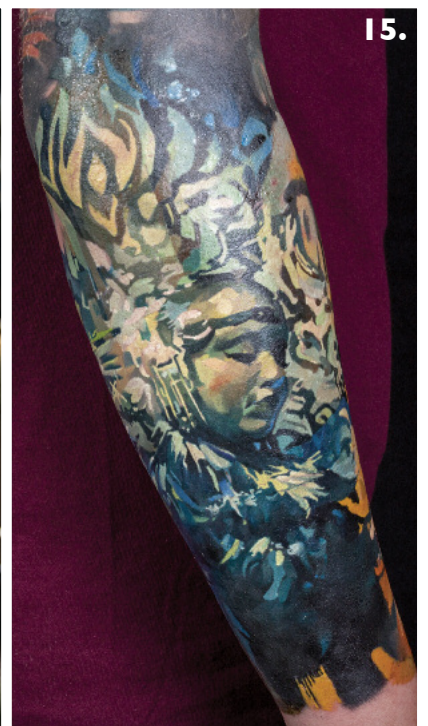
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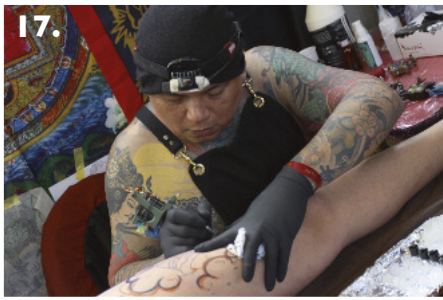
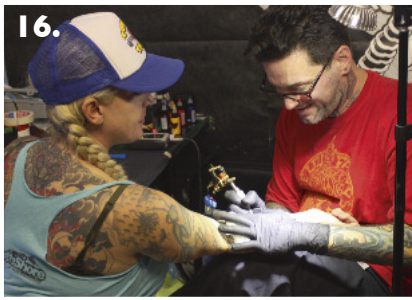


14.



15.

10. hocheon, hocheon art studio (korea)
 11. collabrative backpiece done at show by benjamin laukis, jak connolly, yomico moreno, matt jordan, sam barber & steve butcher
 12. 2000 ad comicon exhibition
 13. the team responsible for the backpiece
 14. renko edge, la main bleue (belgium)



16. The weekend starts on the Friday, and it was immediately apparent that this was going to be a busy three days. Right from the start an excitement and buzz filled the venue, with some returning artists already feeling that the show was going to be more successful than previous years. As well as seeing studios welcomed back, it was equally refreshing to see newcomers to this prestigious event. And as with previous years, the list of world class artists in attendance read like a who's who in tattooing. I overheard a member of the public say "I'm surrounded by tattoo Gods!", and it really felt that way when looking around each room. During the entire weekend, it was a case of 'blink and you'll miss something'.

It's difficult to pinpoint any stand-out pieces, as everything was of such impeccable quality, which was echoed in the competitions. As the crowds gathered at the judging stage, screens allowed the audience to see each entry in great detail. Overall, it was a triumph for UK realism artists, with Jordan Croke (Second Skin), Alex Rattray (Red, Hot and Blue) and Ryan the Scientist each winning categories. The best of show went to a collaborative backpiece between six artists: Jak Connolly, Sam Barber, Yomico Moreno, Steve Butcher, Matt Jordan and Benjamin Laukis. It was truly deserved, not just because of the incredible quality but also the effort and commitment from each tattooist.



- 15. samuel potucek (slovakia)
- 16. crystal 'gomineko' being tattooed by matthieu, the leu family's family iron (switzerland)
- 17. ching tattooing
- 18. costantino sasso, costa tattoo (italy)
- 19. pablo de, tattoo lifestyle (italy)
- 20. otte timar, red lion (hungary)

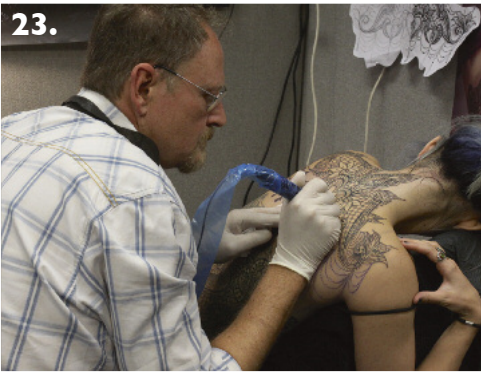
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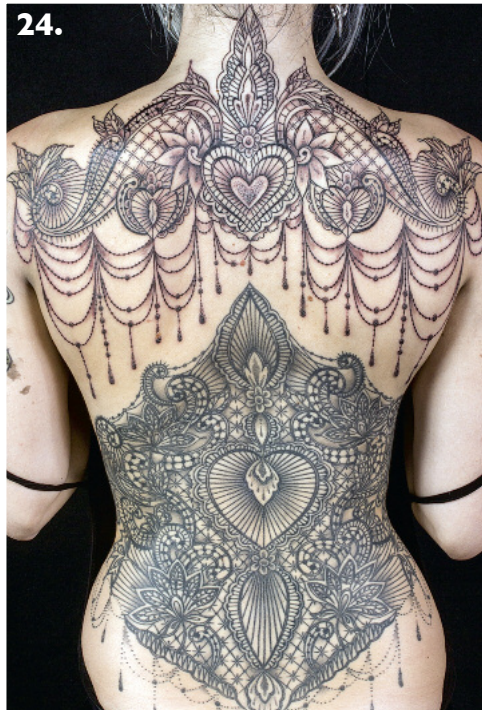
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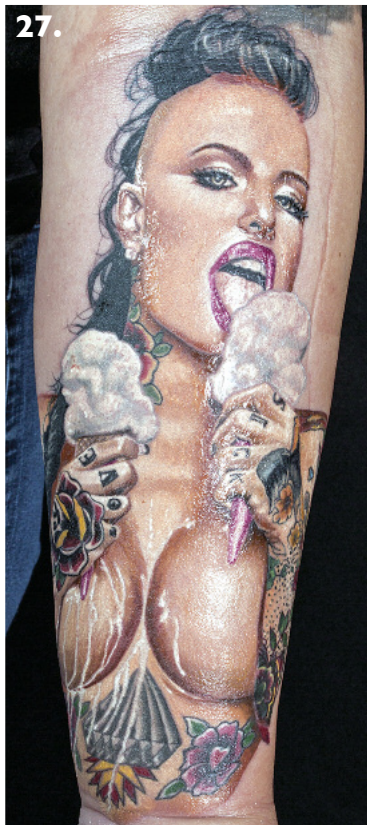
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In addition to awe-inspiring sights from the tattooing rooms, the masses gathered for the entertainment acts that ran throughout the weekend. Both Pyrohex and the Fuel Girls had their own dedicated stages, with great overhead views to be had from the floor above. The sun shone throughout the whole weekend, so visitors could relax outside, have a drink or eat at one of the food venues, and do a bit of people-watching whilst soaking up the electric atmosphere. In the evening, music lovers were treated to some of the best acts around, including King Kurt, Raging Speedhorn, the Urban Voodoo Machine and Orange Goblin, who headlined on the Saturday evening. Drinks tokens were exchanged for lager and Sailor Jerry rum, and convention attendees and tattooists partied into the night.

It's hard to say where the London show can go from here. After twelve years, Marcus, Miki Vialotto and the team can't do any better than what they already do; and let's face it, what they are doing is pretty spectacular. Even down to the minute details (such as labelling each room or providing convention packs for each tattooist) everything has been catered for. It's a huge endeavour to put on any convention, and to run a successful event year after year not only shows how much effort and passion is put into it, but just how good a show it is.

21. rodrigo souto, black garden tattoo
 22. steve butcher, ship shape tattoo (new zealand)
 23. marco manzo working
 24. marco manzo, tribal tattoo studio (italy)
 25. tibi, tempel tattoo (germany)



26. f cheung, dolls tattoo (macau)
27. randy engelhard, heaven of colours (germany)
28. grime, skull and sword (usa)
29. horiyo, needle power tattoo (taiwan)
30. horiyo, needle power tattoo (taiwan)

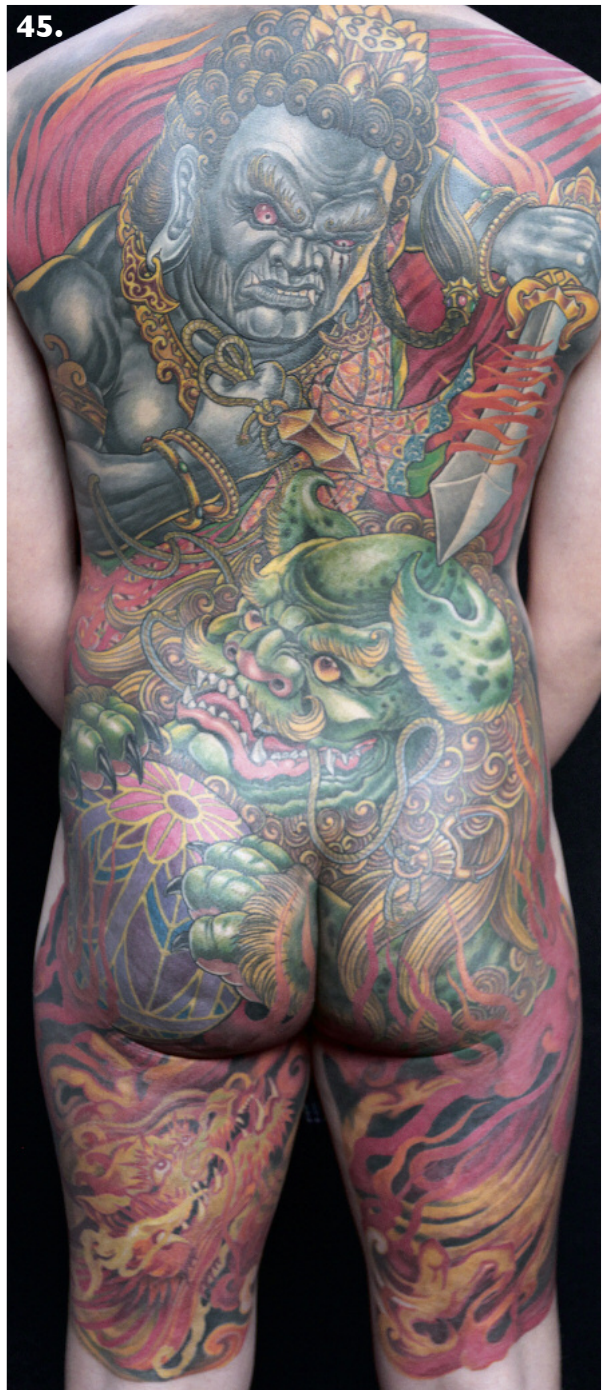






31. benjamin laukis, the black mark (australia)
32. john fowler, east side tattoo
33. natalie, petals puppet
34. the art of joe fenton
35. one of the art exhibitions
36. ching, ching tattoo (taiwan)
37. wenlong liu, cuitattoo (china)

38. tomas vaitkunas, eddy tattoo art studio (lithuania)
39. ryan 'the scientist' smith, nr studios
40. julien corpsepainter (germany)
41. matt jordan, ship shape tattoo (new zealand)
42. justin burnout, ghost house collective



- 44. alex rattray, red hot & blue
- 45. ji zhi dao (taiwan)
- 46. matthieu leu, the leu family's family iron (switzerland)
- 47. brent mccown, tattoo tatau (australia)
- 48. steve butcher, ship shape tattoo (new zealand)
- 49. damian gorski, ushuaia tattoo
- 50. dani martos, demon tattoo (spain)
- 51. jordan croke, second skin
- 52. horien keiko, swallow art (japan)
- 53. mathieu varga, vargas ink (france)



When you enter the Dapper Signs workshop you step into a magical, slightly twisted reality. James Cooper is more than a little obsessed with his work and clearly loves to have fun with it. With his fantastic colours and cheeky slogans, his sense of humour shines through pretty much everything he does – which includes a lot of commissions for tattoo shops. As he himself says, “My signs are not going to blend into the background. They are more likely to punch you in the eye.”

Interview James Sandercock
Pictures James Sandercock and Dapper Signs



DAPPER SIGNING



James first got into sign making back in 2008 when he offered to help out with a friend's catering business. "We were at a festival and my mate needed someone to sort out a couple of blackboards. I was keen to avoid any actual work, so I volunteered. I'm sure what I did was probably as rough as a dog's guts, but I took my time with it and got some nice compliments, and I just thought... maybe this could be my thing. At the time, I was bumbling around doing any old job – van driver, sandwich maker, etc. I had always drawn, I had sketchbooks, and I'd tried to get my shit together, but nothing much had happened in that direction. When I got back home I printed off a bunch of business cards that said 'James Cooper Sign Writer' – as though I had been doing it for thirty years! – and carpet-bombed Bristol with them, and it's very slowly grown from there."



To begin with, James was mainly doing pub signage and café menu boards, taking ages over each one, and charging "fuck all money". He knew they kind of looked OK, but he also knew there was much more to it. But as the bug started to bite he got deeper into his research, spent time talking with experienced sign writers, and began to develop his work properly. He came up with a new business name – Sign Flu. "It seemed like a good idea the time," James explains. "It was off the back of the swine 'flu epidemic that was supposedly going to destroy mankind. But as time went by, my ingenious pun got less funny. People seemed a bit grossed out by a business name that contained the word Flu. And I even got sent samples of 'flu drugs from pharmaceutical companies in America! I felt it was time for a re-brand. Katie, my wife, joined me in the business and she really helped me make it viable."

James was rapidly discovering how little he knew and how much there was to learn. "I knew something about letter forms, and I could certainly draw them, but I didn't really have much of a clue beyond that. I kind of cringe when I look back at some of my early sketches, but I guess that's the same with most artists. There's such a rich history of sign making, and there are hundreds of different styles. I find myself forever looking at old hand-painted signs wherever I go, and I'm constantly critiquing everything, especially my own work. I'm basically a full-time sign nerd. Katie will bear witness to what a crashing bore I can be!"



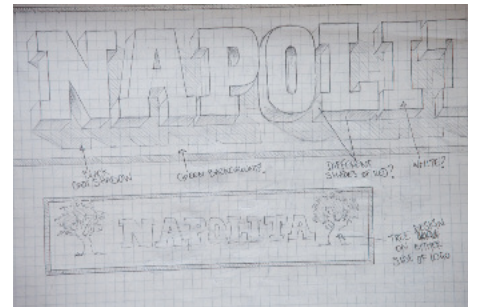
Although he draws inspiration from all over, the American School has the strongest attraction for James. "I've always loved comic books. I'm a big fan of Robert Crumb. I used to study his work obsessively. And Daniel Clowes too. I just like the American approach to that kind of art. I do think it gets a bit abused in the world of 'custom culture', and in the wrong hands it can look naff, but essentially I'm fascinated by the 1950s and 60s casual style. One-stroke lettering and all that snappy, cheap, bright stuff. That's really my thing. Most of my favourite sign writers are American. The interesting thing about sign writing is that in many ways it's all about plagiarism. I've nicked so many letter styles – not so much wholesale theft, just bits. I might like the tail of that R or the slant of that A. You



just take little elements here and there, and then when you are painting them you add your own personality."

In the past, sign writers would generally be responsible for designing their signs as well as making them, but nowadays much of the work involves executing other people's designs. "I enjoy a job so much more when it's my own design," James tells me, "because my ego likes to be massaged. If I get to take something from my sketchbook through to a full-size draft, then on to a finished project, it's incredibly gratifying. That's not to say I don't take pride in working with other people's designs, but the two things are definitely different. I can't be too precious, though. At the end of the day I consider myself a commercial artist first and foremost. I'm lucky. I love this work and it pays the bills."

People have certainly become more aware of the beauty and practicality of hand-painted signs. "I can't remember the last time I had to look for work. I'm turning work down now," James tells me. A year or so ago, he and Katie decided to take Dapper Signs on the road. Fuelled by the interest shown on social media, they embarked on their 'Brexit Tour' of Europe. "I just put up a post saying we had a van with some paint in it, and a loose itinerary, so give us a shout – and plenty of work came our way as we travelled around." They've also worked a couple of tattoo conventions, but I wondered if James had any personal projects in the pipeline – something more self-indulgent perhaps? "Yes, I would





love to do a solo exhibition," he tells me, "but it's a classic case of not being able to find the time..."

There's been a huge resurgence in traditional sign writing. Hand-painted signs are a real practical option once again, and they say so much more about an establishment than plastic lettering or vinyl stickers ever could. It's part of that desire to reach back and embrace the concept of the craftsman and the value he brings to any project. It's a person-to-person thing, on a human scale. Something that the corporate business world won't ever understand.

So if you want to get a hand-painted sign, then why not hit up Dapper Signs (www.dappersigns.co.uk). You won't regret it. As James himself says, "I will do most anything for a few quid."



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COVER MODEL PROFILE

SHONDA



This month's cover model is Shonda, who loves doing music videos, wants to break into the film industry, and dreams about swimming with sea creatures off some faraway island...

How did you get into modelling?

I'm a small-town girl from Colorado... I began modelling in my senior year of high school, working for jewellery catalogues and local stock photographers, then I experienced the whole crazy world of Playboy Mansion parties, but that was all long before I was tattooed. Since then I've been on my own path. I'm a metal music video vixen, and I've graced numerous magazine covers all over the world. But I'm only just getting started! I hope to break into film one day.

Your stage name is Queen of Blood...

Yeah, I chose that name years ago because I like horror and gore!

What's your favourite genre of modelling?

I try to be a chameleon in my own skin. But I would have to say my favourite genres are sci-fi – with crazy make-up and effects that make me look like a creature – and glamour. I'm passionate about photography that tells a story, that makes you feel something, but that often gets lost in all the sexiness because basically you have to post pictures that will get people's attention. I hope readers will take a look at some of my more artistic work.

Do you have any advice for new models trying to break into the industry?

Decide what it is that you want to do, and stick to it. Don't get forced into doing something you don't want to do. There are many kinds of modelling out there, and you don't have to get naked! Remember your safety is always the number one priority.

How would you describe your personal style?

Hmmm... Marilyn Monroe rode off with James Dean, got a tattoo and turned bad! Stylewise, I'm definitely sneakers rather than stilettos.

What was your first tattoo and how do you feel about it now?

My first tattoo was the cross on my back. I don't particularly care for it now, because of its lack of artistic quality compared to my other tattoos. But I do still love it because it was my own drawing that the artist used as a stencil and I can't draw shit...

Tell us about your octopus.

It was a recurring dream that I had for many years. I would dive to the bottom of the ocean and this huge octopus would come out of a cave... It was very comforting and calming, and extremely powerful. After diving with them in Hawaii and the Bahamas I decided that would be the image for my arm piece. Now my ambition is to swim with a 30ft manta ray off some faraway island...

Do you like to design your own tattoos or do you rely entirely on your artist?

I definitely like to help with designing my tattoos because they are going on to my body. I always want them to flow along the natural muscle lines and curves, so that they complement my body rather than hiding it.

Any plans for future ink?

Yes – many plans, including starting the other half of my sleeve tomorrow.

And finally, what do you want to be when you grow up?

That's a great question! But I don't think I'll ever be able to answer it because it changes all the time!

How do we get in touch?

Follow me on Instagram @Queenofblood or you can tweet me @shondalaurelee

Words and pictures Jenna Kraczek

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ROBIN HOOD TATTOO FESTIVAL

It's official – small is the new black. Huge blockbuster conventions can be really great, but sometimes you need to strip right back, downsize and have a damn good laugh. This is exactly what the Robin Hood Tattoo Festival is all about.

The venue, Cotgrave Welfare Club, is located just outside of Nottingham. It has ample car parking and good transport links, and inside it's a large open area, with a mezzanine floor, bar and stage. Doors opened to the public at 11am, and a relaxed atmosphere soon bubbled into the venue.

With just over thirty artists, this is one of the smallest tattoo conventions in the UK. However, this does not mean it is in any way lacking. The tattooists are hand-selected by the organisers, and therefore they're some of the very best in the UK. This was reflected by the sheer quality of tattoos that were produced throughout the weekend. From the impeccable detail of pieces by the likes of Mark Bester, to the mind-blowing script by Niorkz, there really was something for everyone.

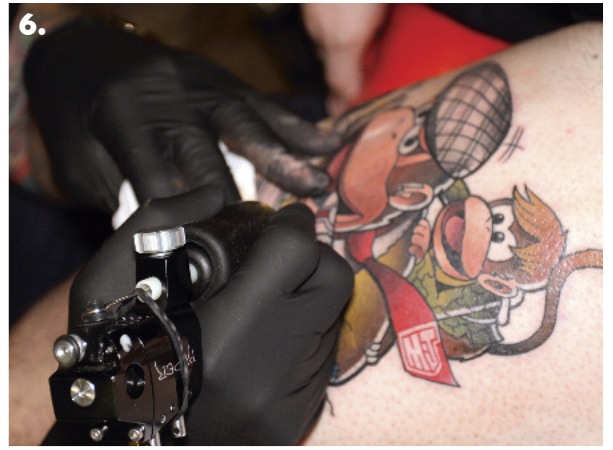
Gray and Claire (of Rampant Ink) organised the event, and it seemed they couldn't do enough for the artists and public. There was a green room for vendors and tattooists, with a healthy supply of tea, coffee, doughnuts, and other refreshments. Gray compered throughout, and he was brilliant – loud, funny and sincere! Throughout the weekend, the whole team were on hand, with smiles on their faces, to attend to everyone's needs. And some great bands graced the stage, which added to the atmosphere – without being too off-putting for the working tattooists.

It's not often that a convention can be called a 'festival' and truly mean it, but from start to finish this weekend was fun with a capital F. One of the highlights was the 'competitions'.

With so many fantastic, award-winning artists present, it was apparent that there was no need for any formalities; during the weekend, Gray and Neil Dalleywater simply went around the booths, looking at the tattoos being executed, and basing their decisions on what they saw. They then announced the runners-up and winners. The runners-up were presented with a 'unique' trophy – created by another artist present at the show – whilst the winners were given a more, shall we say, 'professional' trophy! It must have been difficult to choose the stand-out pieces from all the excellent work being created, but it was great to see the Best of Show being awarded to Jordan Croke (Second Skin) for his mind-blowing realism.

As the Sunday began to draw to a close, artists and the public were encouraged to delve into their pockets for the charity auction. This year, the chosen charities were MIND and Macmillan Cancer Support. The items in the auction had been donated by artists and traders present, and from a wooden personalised pirate ship by Burning Sensations pyrography to the stunning paintings of Filip Pasička, they reflected the overall standard of the artists and the show.

The Robin Hood Tattoo Festival is a must-visit, whether you are a regular attendee of tattoo conventions or new to the whole experience. Essentially, this show contains everything that is right about the tattoo world: exceptionally talented artists, a laid-back atmosphere and no egos. With such a great format, it can only get better and better.

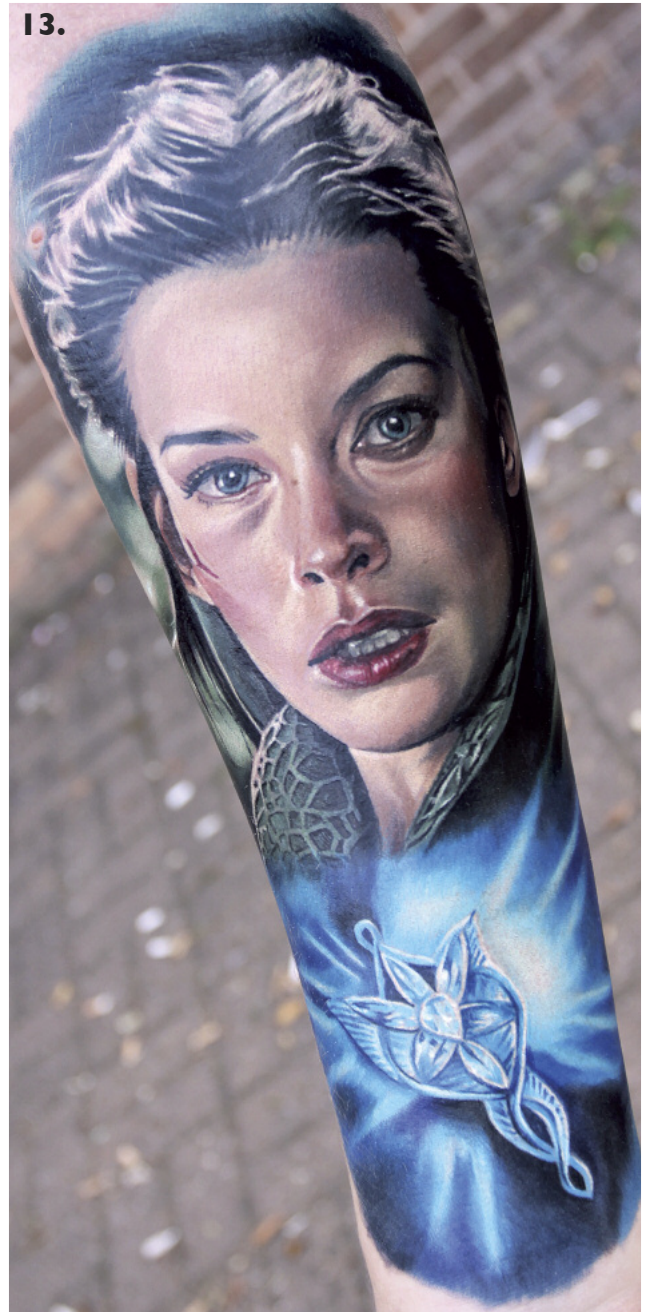


12.



- 4. jairo, kamil tattoo
- 5. liam freeman, wet paint collective
- 6. andy walker, working
- 7. tim croke, second skin
- 8. brenden, tattoo hq
- 9. andy walker, creative vandals
- 10. lee hallam, leeroy tattoo
- 11. kayley henderson, northside tattooz
- 12. jairo, kamil tattoo
- 13. jordan croke, second skin
- 14. dan stone, electric buddha
- 15. theresa gordon-wade art fusion
- 16. woz p, hales street tattoo
- 17. trophies for the losers

13.



14.



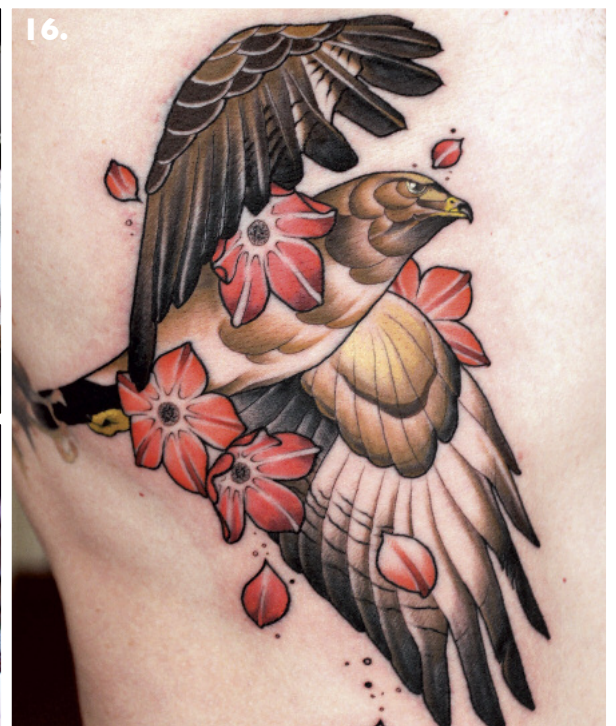
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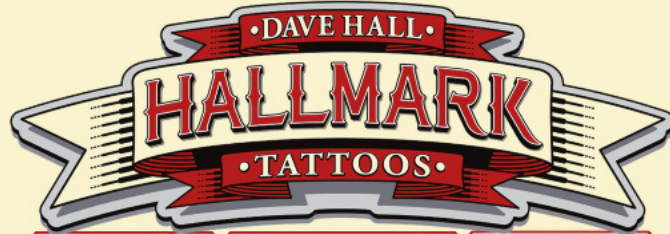
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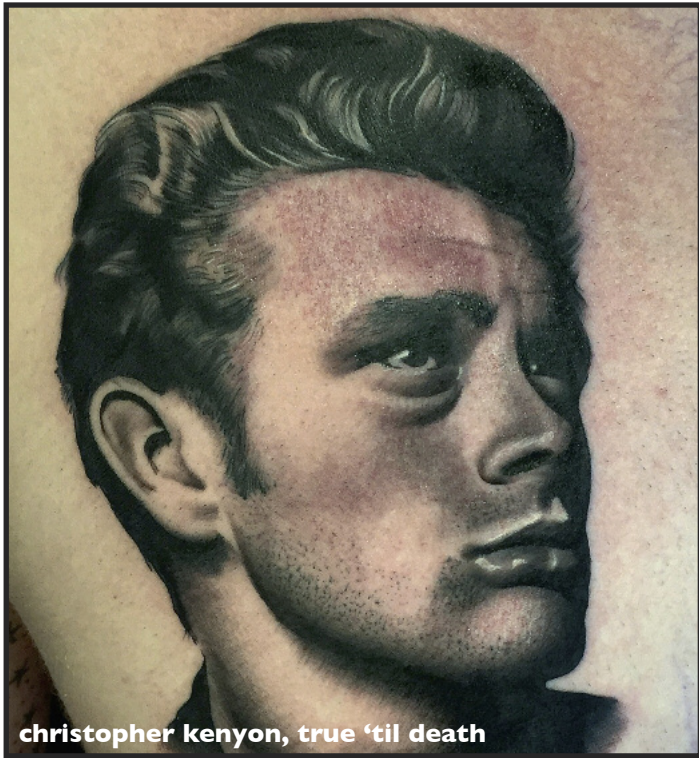
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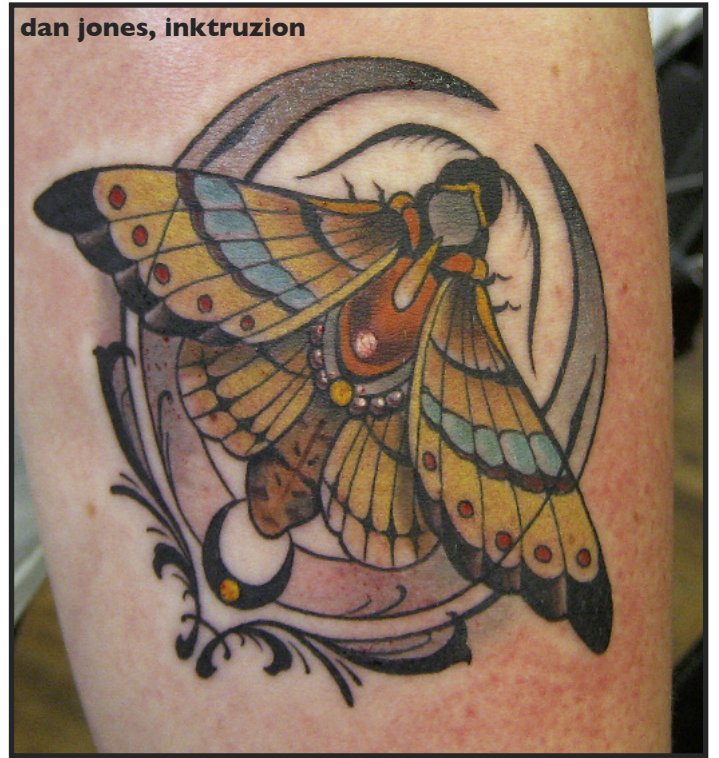
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GALLERY



christopher kenyon, true 'til death



dan jones, inktruzion



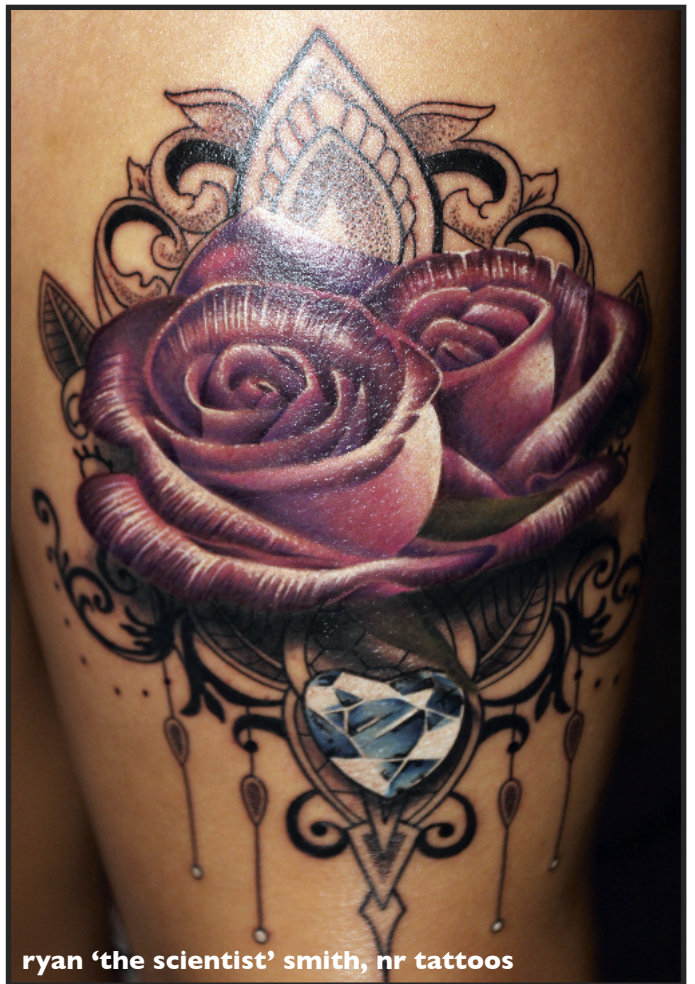
lee hallam, leeroy inks



chris jones, physical graffiti



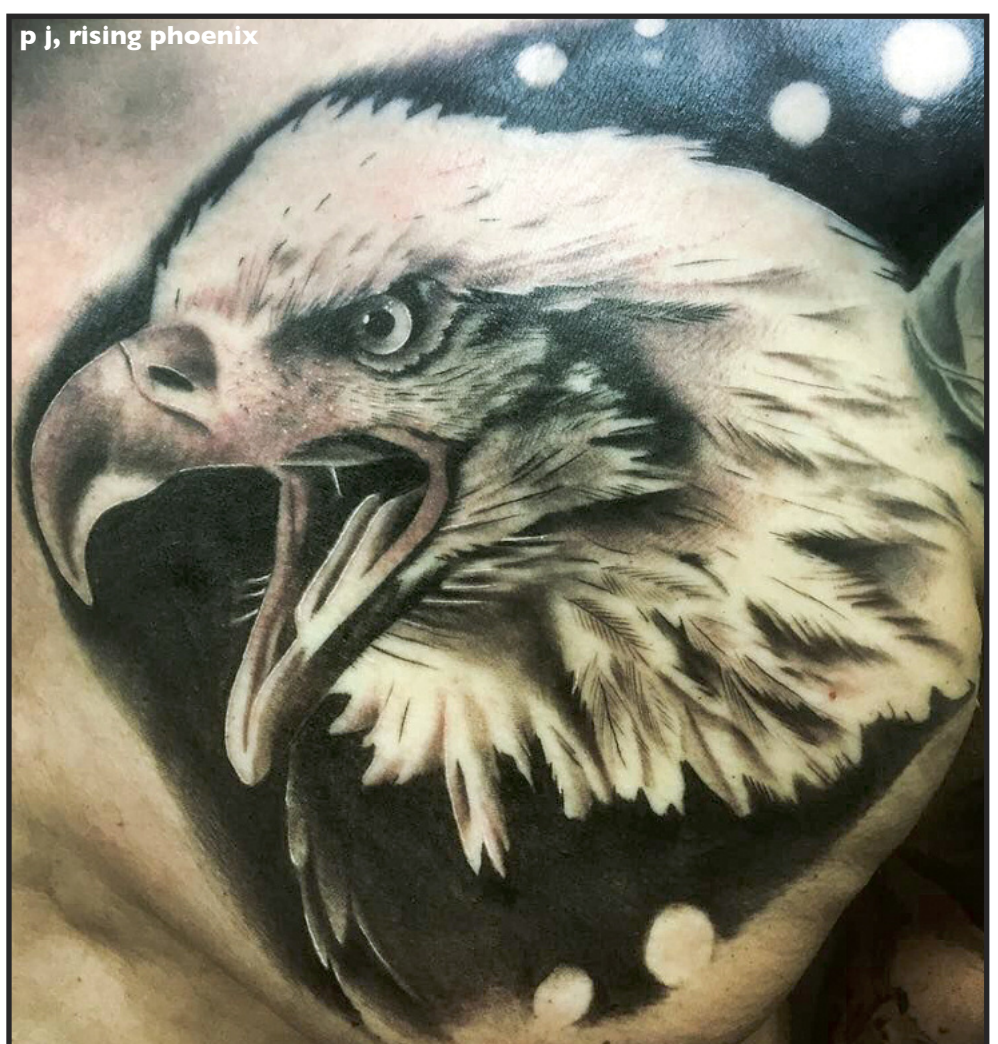
duncan x, into you



ryan 'the scientist' smith, nr tattoos

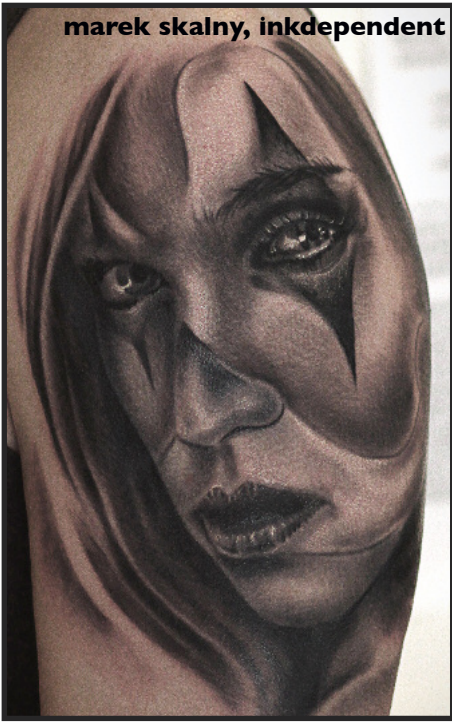


anna garvey, adorn tattoo



p j, rising phoenix

marek skalny, inkdependent



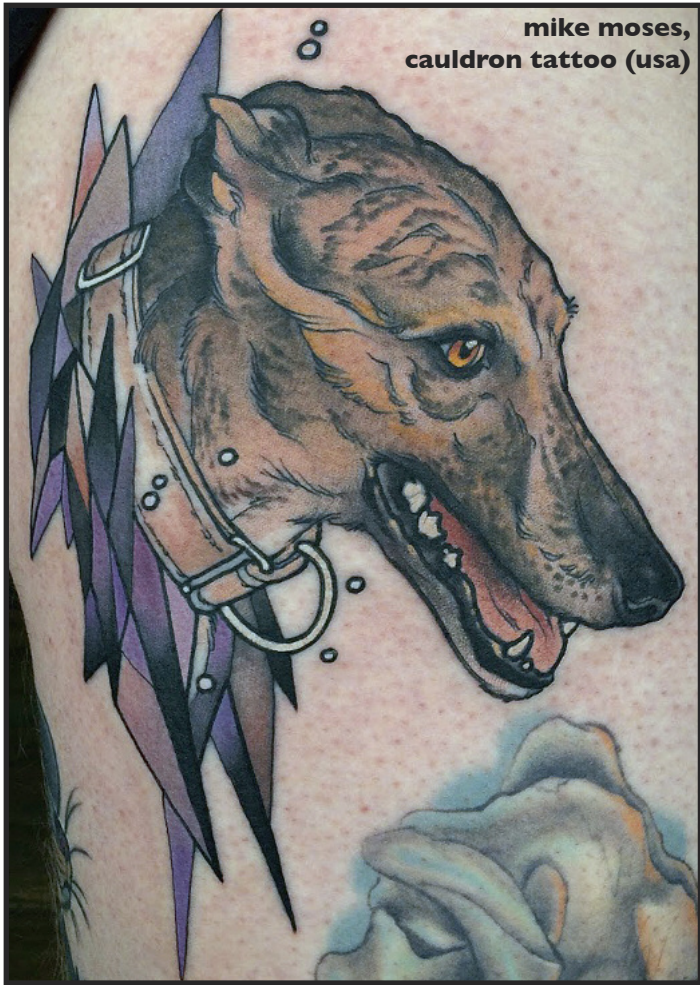
alan proctor, twit twoo



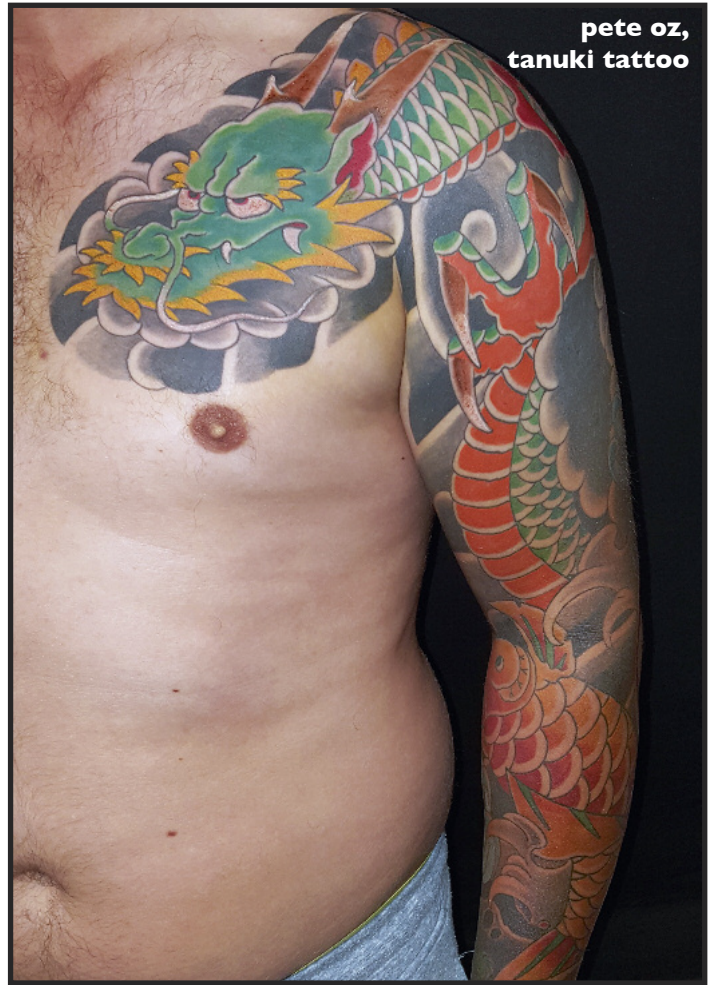
george bonner



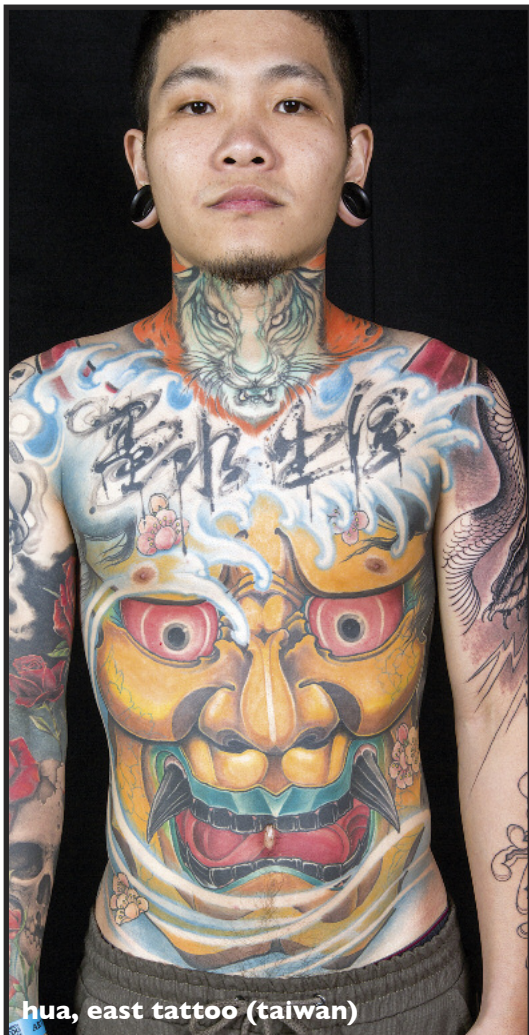
alan hindes, tatt house



mike moses,
cauldron tattoo (usa)



pete oz,
tanuki tattoo



hua, east tattoo (taiwan)



peter lagergren, malmö classic (sweden)

jo harrison, un l ty tattoo



stu pagdin,
house of daggers
(australia)



rory dickie, terry's tattoo studio



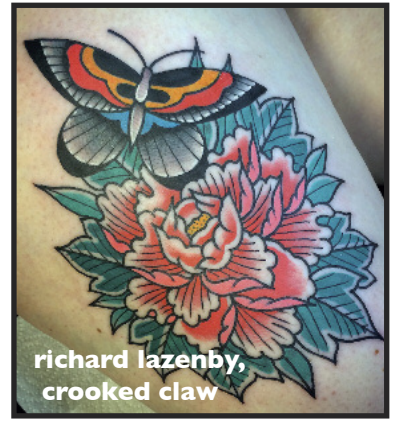
anrijs straume, bold as brass



dave weighill, on the line



alister ephraim,
eye circus tattoo (goa)



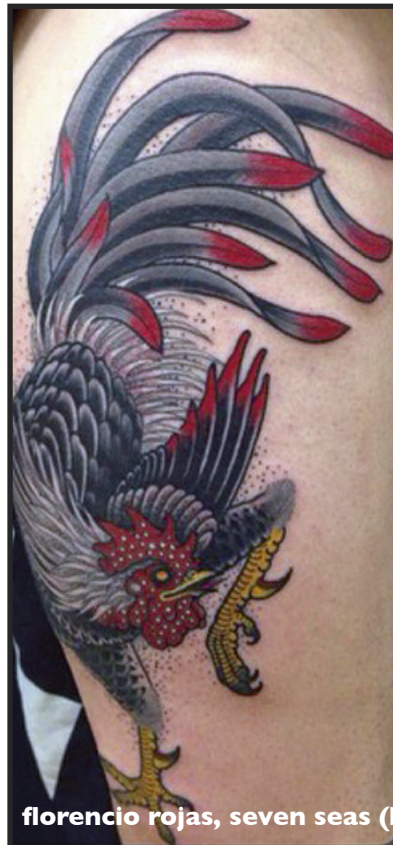
richard lazenby,
crooked claw



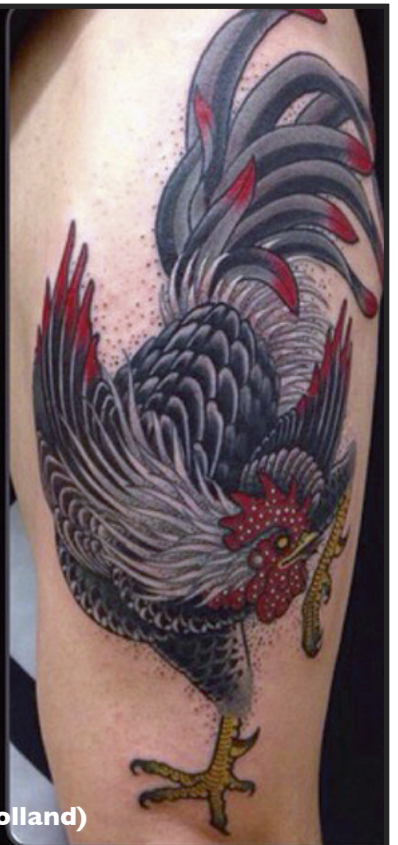
maud dardeau,
tin tin tatouages



steven mostyn,
memories and mischief
(germany)

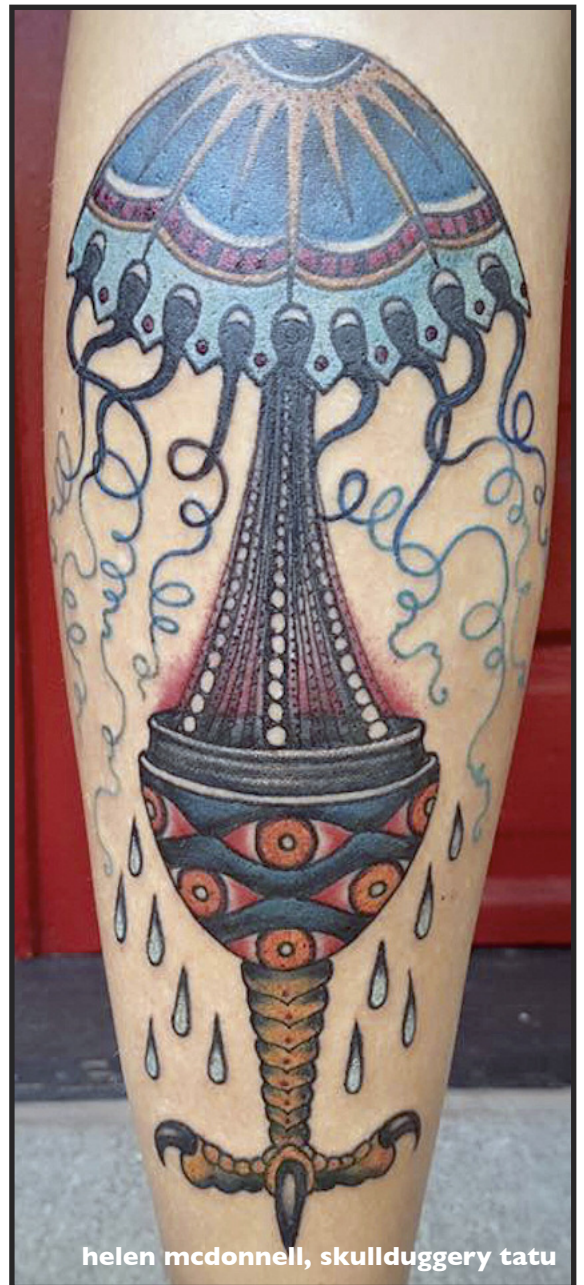


florencio rojas, seven seas (holland)





saz saunders, saz tattoo studio

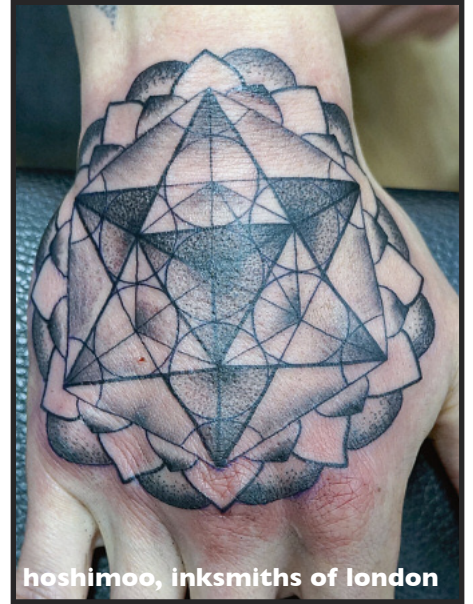


helen mcdonnell, skullduggery tatu



simon thomas,
equinox tattoo collective

calle corson, king carlos tattoo (sweden)



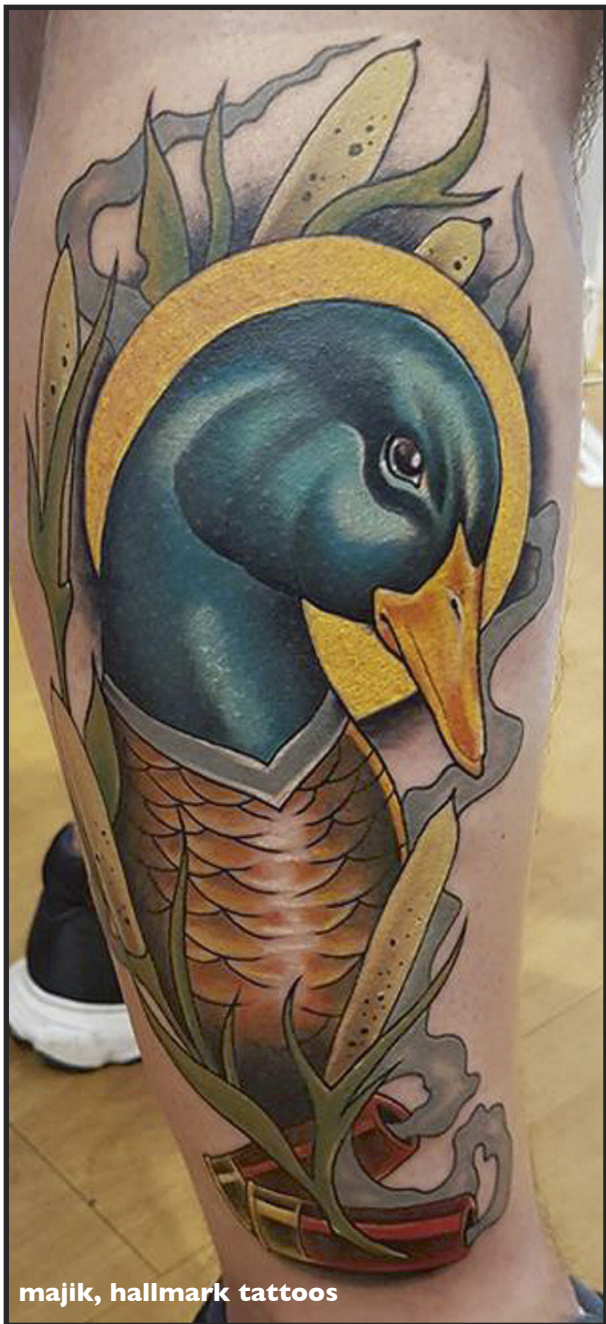
hoshimoo, inksmiths of london



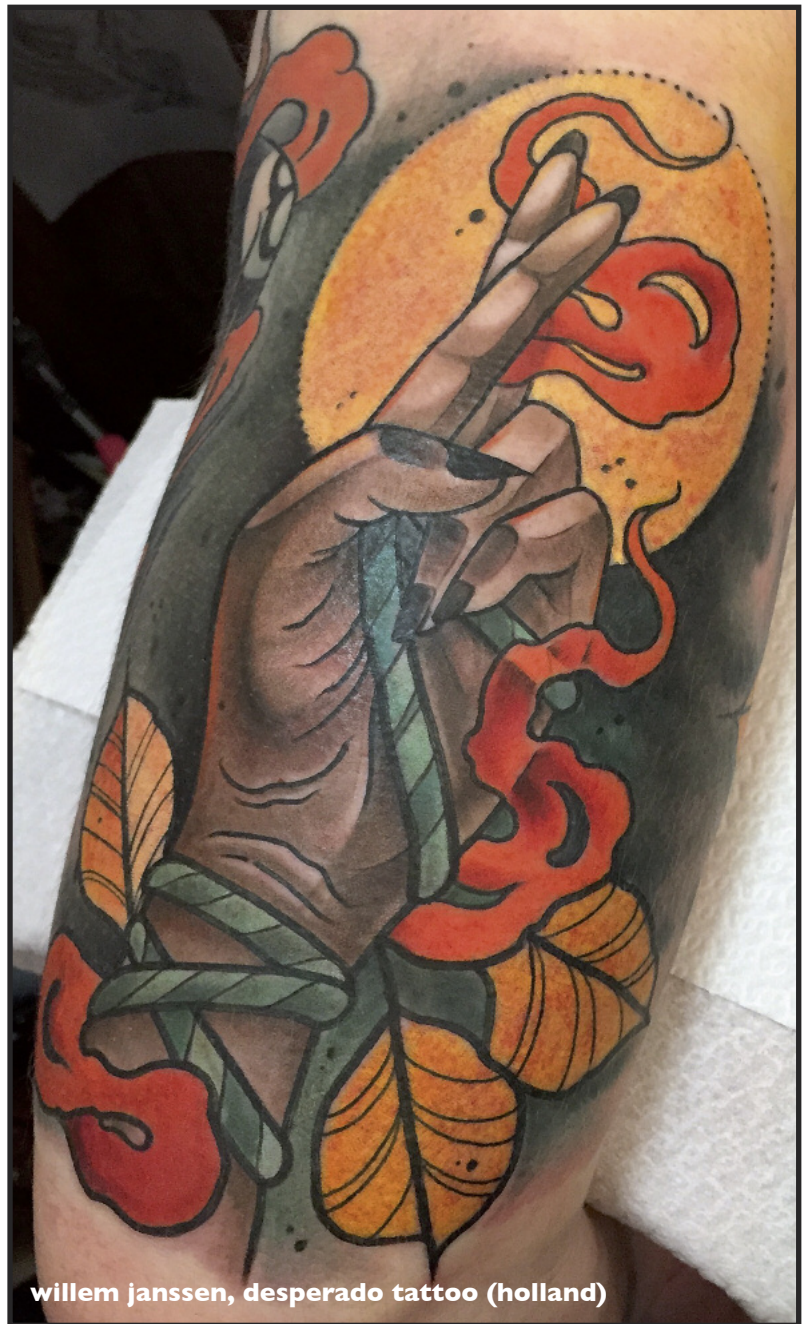
lauren roberts, true colour



**peter lagergren
malmö classic (sweden)**



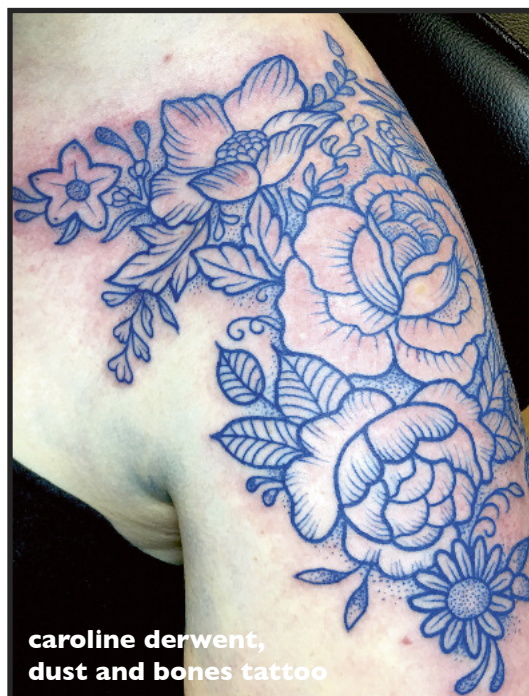
majik, hallmark tattoos



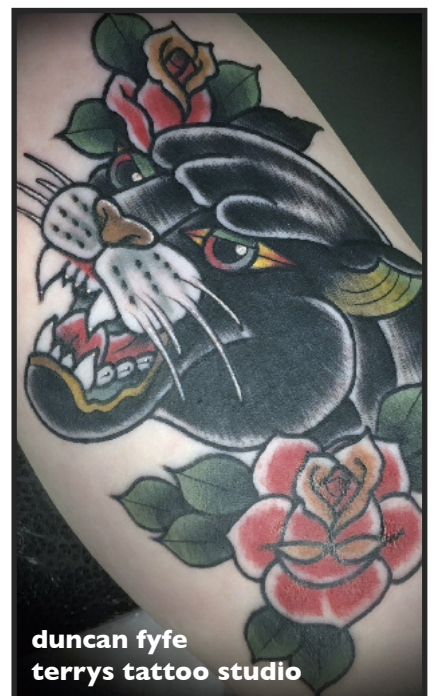
willem janssen, desperado tattoo (holland)



adam mcdermott,
folklore tattoo



caroline derwent,
dust and bones tattoo



duncan fyfe
terrystattoo studio

alex batten, black dog tattoos



tony,
left hand tony



laura lenihan, kilburn original



myles jones,
inkarma

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INKDEPENDENTTATTOOS



Surrealist influences have long been a part of the visual language of Western tattooing. In fact this bizarre, playful and paradoxical mashing together of imagery now seems to be more popular than ever. Jack Watts (aka Tattoos For Your Enemies) is the epitome of the 'surrealist tattooist', not just in the imagery he creates but in the way he creates it. As he himself says, "You get roughly what you ask for..."

Echoes of famous Dada and Surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali, Joan Miro and Marcel Duchamp are to be found in the contemporary tattoo styles of London's Deno, Milan's Pietro Sedda, the Czech Republic's Mato and many others. Even the likes of Ed Hardy, Bob Roberts, Dan Higgs and Spider Webb had streaks of surrealist influence in their work through the 80s and 90s. Sexual allusions, fantastical animals and tripped out cosmic juxtapositions are not exactly uncommon as tattoo designs.

But 'Surrealism' is not simply the creation of strange designs. It's a full set of processes to allow the utter weirdness, darkness, sexual depravity and repressed violence at the core of every human being to be made visible. As a group, the original Surrealists (and their precursors the Dadaists) sought to highlight the nonsense and chaos of World War I through their increasingly absurdist art. They also wanted to test Sigmund Freud's ideas about the nature of the human psyche and they used various practices to try to unlock their minds in order to create drawing, painting and poetry. So although there's a clear undercurrent of surrealist imagery in tattoo design, the celebrated Surrealist philosophies and experiments are not so apparent in the way most tattooers actually work.



The most famous of these experiments was known as 'automatic drawing', and its foremost exponent was André Masson, founder but now lesser known member of the Parisian surrealists, and long time antagonist of Dali. To produce an automatic drawing, Masson would sit down with a piece of paper and a pen, and begin to move it randomly, without thinking – leaving spiralling, inky traces. By letting the unconscious mind push aside any conscious thought, these drawings (so the theory went) would then be able to be



TATTOOS FOR YOUR ENEMIES



analysed for hidden shapes and symbols, particularly in light of Freud's idea that the unconscious mind was basically a sluice of repressed sexual guilt and violent anger. Masson's chaotic drawings frequently resolved on close inspection to scenes of orgies and massacres.

Jack Watts is the André Masson of modern tattooing. Most of his tattoos begin life, like Masson's work did, as absent-minded, automatic doodles which he then turns into images, seeking out the forms and figures amongst the scribble. Others, he tells me, are drawn from memory. If a client brings reference, he'll study it only briefly before reproducing it from his imagination – the end result being a comic distortion filtered through his day-glo subconscious. He creates jagged, black lined, grotesque parodies of familiar tattoo designs, classic cartoon characters, fantastic military vehicles, and the weirdest corners of 20th and 21st century popular culture: B-movies, conceptual art, and WWF wrestlers. His flash sheets are like peering into the history of tattooing through a fairground mirror; the familiar eagles, daggers and panthers are all present, but in his hands they become warped, crude and bent. They're not *badly drawn* – quite the contrary, as it's clear Jack Watts is a decent draughtsman and a technically solid tattooer – but they are *bad* in the best possible way; a way that's exciting, joyous and frequently hilarious.

Born in Hemel Hempstead, 27-year old Jack now tattoos primarily out of the enormously diverse studio Sang Bleu in Dalston, London. Despite his best efforts to convince people otherwise, he's become primarily known by the moniker 'Tattoos for Your Enemies', a joke that has gone way too far and gotten somewhat out of hand. "That was the name of my 'zine," he explains. "When I started drawing my designs, they were so gnarly I literally thought no-one would willingly get them tattooed. You'd wish them on your worst enemy!" he chuckles. "The name just stuck, and then I was committed to it. Mr Enemies..."

Despite what might seem like a niche appeal, Jack's been able to build a decent client base for his esoteric designs through hard work and an easy, relaxed self-belief in his approach to the craft of tattooing. Listening back to the

tape of our interview, it's clear that I'm bringing reams of fairly pretentious art historical criticism and tattoo history to our conversation, whilst he's primarily a humble, funny, interesting artist following his thoughts to see what strange little images he might find inside his head.

That said, Jack is soaked in knowledge about art, and art history, though he wears it incredibly lightly. He was fairly disruptive in art classes at school, thrusting his hands into pots of paint rather than producing another tedious still life, but when he went to university to study photography he found himself inspired to begin to properly explore some of the ideas he was beginning to form. A course in digital photography offered little that interested him, but the facilities of the darkroom and his brief taste of art history gave him the space and the impetus to start experimenting with pinhole photography, one of the oldest and most raw forms of taking photos. From his interest in DIY pinhole cameras, some of which he used to take pictures in tattoo studios long before he ever considered becoming a tattooer, Jack became friends with Turner Prize-nominated artist Steven Pippin, known for his own fairly wild works with makeshift cameras. Pippin schooled Jack in the works of surrealists such as Man Ray and Duchamp, and soon Jack found himself grinding down bullets for a hybrid camera-gun Pippin wanted to build (which would shoot live rounds as the shutter clicked).

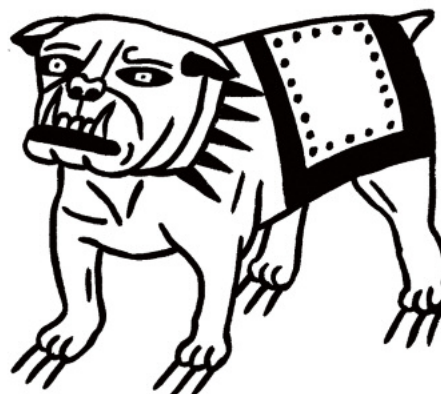
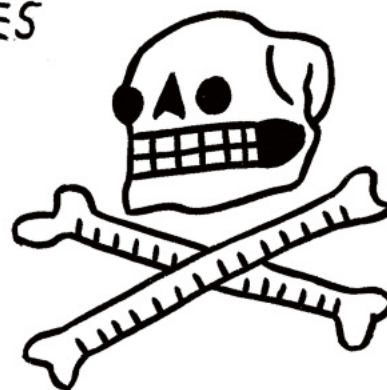


It seems to me that this interest in the building blocks of image making (and the dangerous potential of those building blocks) remains at the heart of how Jack works, even though he's moved away from cameras and back to ink. He had grown up watching his granddad draw clunky little caricatures of Mickey Mouse and Popeye, and learned to occupy his hands with constant, endless doodling. He began to get tattooed, and produce self-published fanzines of his drawings, but he never considered that there was any market at all for the types of images he was jokingly calling "tattoo designs". He began helping out Martin Clark at Bluebird Tattoo in Watford, just as a shop assistant and with no real thought of becoming a tattooer, then at the Brighton tattoo convention a



few years ago he found himself unexpectedly selling copies of his 'zine off the corner of Lal Hardy's booth. "People were interested. They asked me if I tattooed, but I told them no."

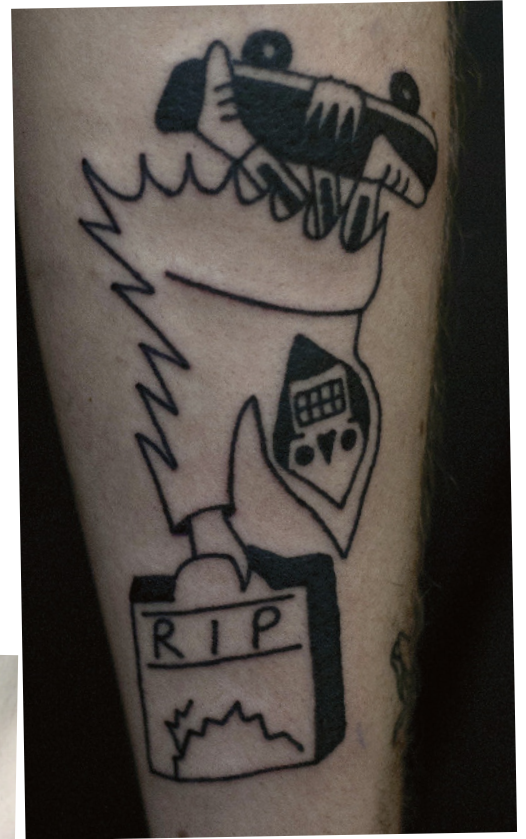
TATTOOS FOR YOUR ENEMIES





Those conversations planted a seed in his mind, though, and it became apparent that he might – *just might* – have a career ahead of him as a tattoo artist, on his own terms. He initially trained under Clark, who encouraged his dark humour and artistic autonomy, and eventually found himself in fairly steady demand amongst customers who understood the philosophy of his work, even if only instinctively.

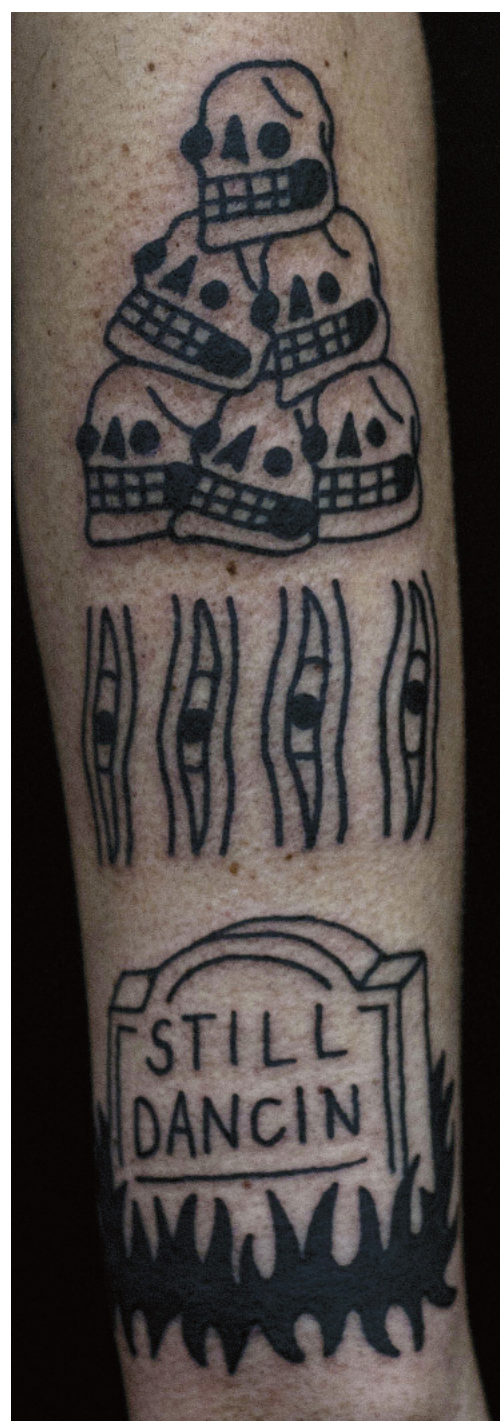
Jack Watts isn't working in any kind of easy-to-understand vernacular, and clearly his work won't appeal to everyone. But the man himself is increasingly confident in what he's doing. "I feel more comfortable with these images as tattoos now", he says, "but I never used to. I just drew them for the enjoyment. I didn't think you could tattoo them."



Jack's designs are manifestly tattooable. It's hard to explain, but they *look* like tattoo designs, even though they don't look like the kind of tattoos that anyone else is doing, or that anyone else has ever done in a professional setting, really. They are both stupid and brilliant. It seems to me that Jack has somehow managed to reverse-engineer the tattoo image. He hasn't studiously sat down and copied old prison or sailor designs; he hasn't set out to affect an awkward drawing style; he doesn't just ironically create what he calls "janky" drawings; but by combining a really relaxed, confident penmanship with a passion for the raw materials of image-making, his work sits in a long tradition of amateur tattoo artists going back to the 19th century – crooks, schoolboys, cranks, sailors – whose



tattoos were monochrome, honest and bonkers. All those indecipherable glyphs; all those images of eyes and misshapen flowers and pigs riding bicycles. Somehow, without deliberately setting out to do so, Jack has stumbled across what makes those old French prison tattoos so interesting, vital, appealing. Even when Jack's designs are based on something outside of themselves it never looks like he's studiously copied the original (although there's clearly some instinctive appreciation of where the picture has come from). Tracy Emin's 'Tent', Man Ray's erotically-charged iron 'Cadeau', a geometric abstract sculpture by Sol LeWitt, a placard reading 'I'm desperate' after a photo by Gillian Wearing... they're all reborn as confident but wonky pen drawings jostling for space on a flash sheet. On another sheet, half-remembered bastardisations of Tex Avery cartoons jostle with scribbled, malformed monsters. Jack tells me someone once asked him to tattoo a picture of their Nan. "It wasn't flattering", he laughs, "but it worked. You always get roughly what you ask for!"





Jack's interest in the primal tools of his art-making has led him to painstakingly cut some acetate stencils with a pin vice, much as mid-century tattooers would have done, seemingly in a quest to understand the purest, most distilled version of his craft. He's also played with sculpture, woodcuts and linocut – always with levity and humour. Despite the erudition I want to read into his work, Jack is chilled out and resolutely hilarious; all these layers of art and history sit breezily within a tattooer who is basically keeping himself amused, and hoping a few other people get the joke too. His work is classically deadpan, dry, dark and rude. "I always try to make it fun", he says. "Essentially it's a ridiculous thing. You're paying someone to tattoo a stupid drawing. People can get bogged down in taking it way too seriously."



Perhaps without even realising it, Jack then makes the perfect Dadaist statement (echoing the way those original artists, a hundred years ago, used humour and absurdity to comment on the senselessness of war). "Everything is so serious and depressing right now", he grins. "It's nice to come and get a tattoo that will make you laugh."

Jack Watts
Sang Bleu Tattoo
29B Dalston Lane, London E8 3DF, UK
www.sangbleu.london
020 8616 0840



1. ruby burlesque & madeline glasseater
2. adam harrison, station ink
3. artist unknown
4. sophie brown, forever ink
5. velma burlesque
6. matt, holy ghost tattoo collective
7. artist unknown
8. sam nuttall, handmade tattoo gallery



BLACKPOOL TATCON

Situated within the hen-and-stag capital of England, and nestled just a couple of miles north along the seafront from the iconic Blackpool Tower, the imposing and dramatic Norbreck Castle Hotel is a massive complex of fine British holidaymaking heaven complete with castellated battlements and nearly 500 rooms! Originally built 150 years ago, this vastly and unsympathetically extended monolith is the home of the Tatcon Tattoo convention.

The show is now in its third year. For its debut, there were only fifty artists in attendance; last year, for its second incarnation, just over a hundred came; and this time round there were close to a hundred and sixty – so it's clear that it's growing in all the right directions. Four double-sided rows of booths ran the entire length of the main hall and housed most of the working artists, with an extra row in the corridor. An adjacent room played host to a number of stalls selling jewellery, cakes, t-shirts, etc, and it was also here that Jimmy Skuse and The Bristol Tattoo Club had a large display of memorabilia.

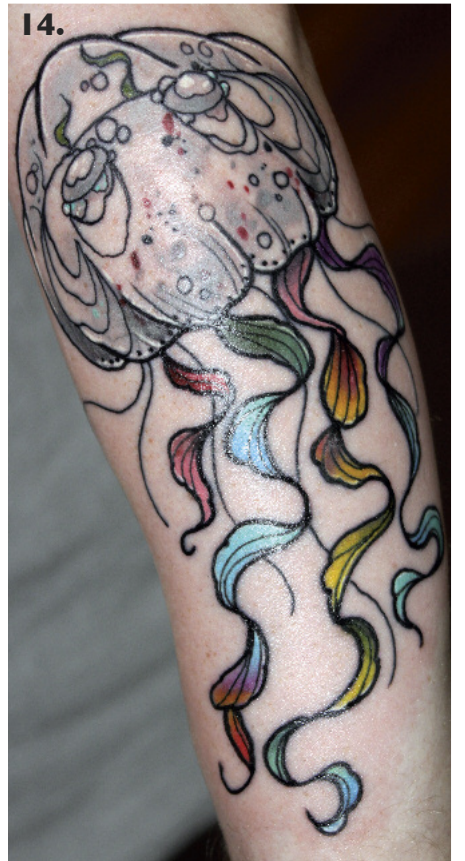
The list of artists was very impressive. Tofi from Inkognito had made the journey from Poland, and Max Pniewski from Southmead, Piotr Przybylski, and Ted Bartnek were also there. It's good to see how the Polish artists support each other, and it was great to have the opportunity to check out some great new talent. Rather than me name-checking everyone here, why not take a look at www.tatconblackpool.co.uk to see the whole roster.

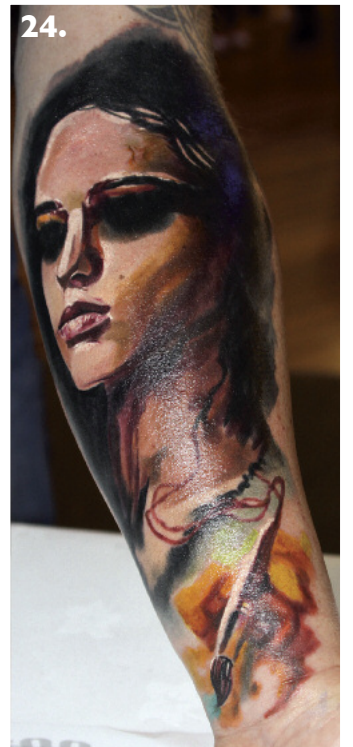
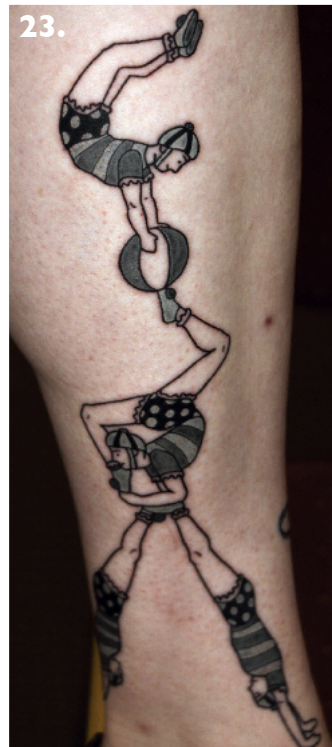
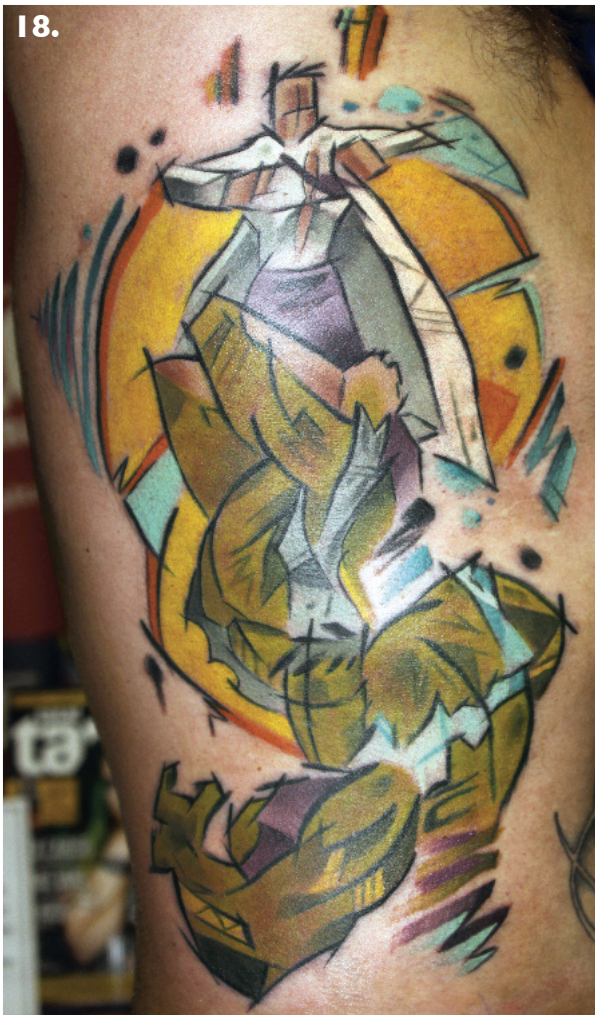
A large stage in the same hall as the artists catered for a comprehensive and continuous string of entertainment that kept the crowds happy, although at times the volume did

exceed the realms of comfort particularly for some of the tattooists at that end of the hall. There were several seminars over the weekend for tattooists to expand their knowledge banks. Tofi did a session on concept sketching in Photoshop, 3D modelling, rendering and post-production; Ted Bartnek presented his theory of designing in Photoshop through to handling the machine and photographing the finished tattoo; and Sonny Mitchell offered a step-by-step guide to portraiture. Competitions play a big part in this show and they took place in the second room, with the prize-giving back in the main hall. I had the immense pleasure of judging and seeing the work close up. Prizes were awarded for first, second and third places and it was truly inspiring to see so many good pieces come along.

It seemed to me that the focus of Tatcon is fun and enjoyment, with tattooing as a vehicle. Reasonably priced accommodation coupled with a decent show entry price ensured that many of the artists and visitors alike chose to stay at the hotel itself, giving the whole event a real 'Tattooists on Holiday' vibe. Everyone I spoke to was having a good time, and I am seriously looking forward to next year's show. Who knows... if the trend is anything to go by, it could be even bigger!







9. danny edwards, forever ink
 10. karl bennison, obsession
 11. artist unknown
 12. callam godley, holy mountain tattoos
 13. david brazendale, forever ink
 14. damian hope ellams, hello sailor
 15. artist unknown
 16. max pniewski, southmead tattoo
 17. trophies
 18. wayne bewley, dynamite tattoo
 19 & 20. callam godley, holy mountain tattoo
 21. mark bester, marked for life
 22. patryk mazur, southmead tattoos
 23. artist unknown
 24. artist unknown

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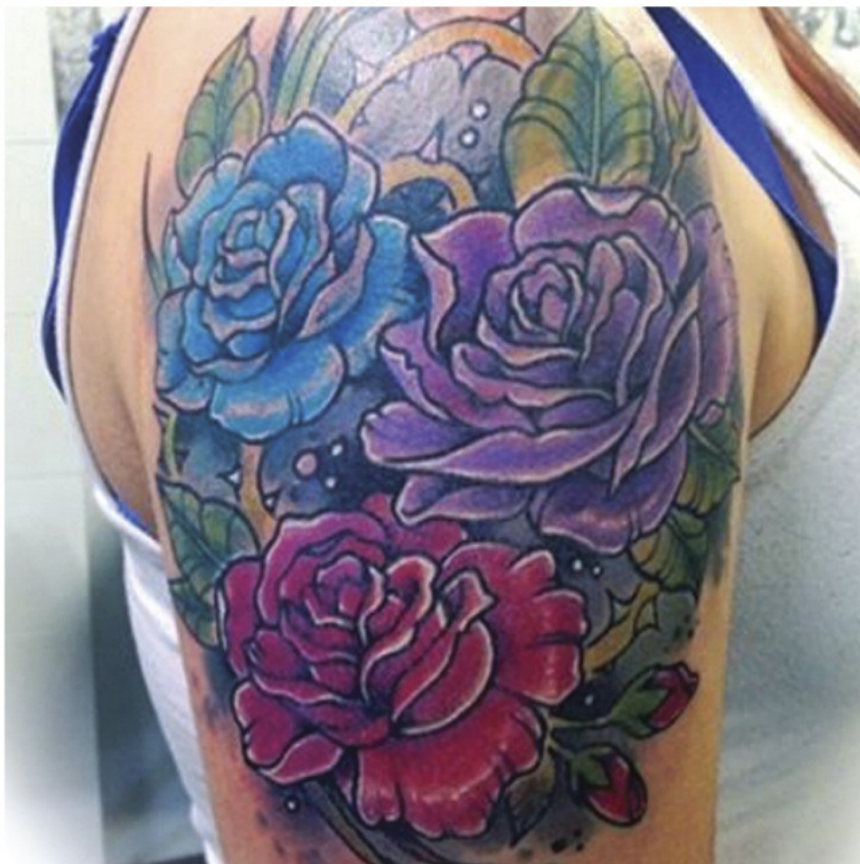
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CHRIS SUTTON

FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE NEEDLE

Chris Sutton of Flaming Art on what the media doesn't want you to know about custom tattoos!

It's almost impossible to get through a day without being bombarded by imagery relating to the tattoo industry – on television, on social media, or in print. The very fact that we are referred to as an 'industry' rather than a 'community' is testament to the fact that, for better or worse, we are now in the public eye, in a very commercial way, more than ever before. Whilst we cannot deny that the media have enabled tattooing as a whole (and us as individual artists) to grow, it would be foolish to ignore the damage that has been done. The broadcast media in particular have exploited tattooing for their own gain, cheapening our craft and distorting the wider public's perception of what is actually involved in creating a custom piece of tattoo art.



Over the next few pages, with the help of my client Naomi, I will try to describe (for the benefit of those who have been misled by television and the internet) exactly how much time and effort went into the creation of one of my recent custom pieces. First I will tell you how I work, then Naomi will tell you how it feels from her side of the needle.

With a bit of luck, regardless of whether this particular design is your cup of tea or not, this article will give you a taste of what thousands of artists around the world are doing on a daily basis – something that is often overlooked and taken for granted. It seems that so many people are unaware of the complexity of the process (especially its early stages) and surprised when they find out exactly what goes into a custom tattoo. Keep this in mind as you thumb through the pages of this issue of Total Tattoo, and pause for a moment to think how many hours of passion and dedication have gone into all those stunning pieces of art that have been created by the talented guys and girls of our community.



MY OWN PROCESS

This is by no means the definitive way to create a tattoo; it is simply the process that I use. Each artist committed to their craft will have their own preferred way of doing things.

First Contact

Fairly obvious, but the first stage of any tattoo is when a potential client contacts me – by email, phone or by visiting the studio – to arrange a consultation to discuss their piece. Not much more to say!

Consultation

This stage is really important. The consultation allows me to break the ice with the client, get a feel for the person, and try my best to identify their needs and requirements, whilst explaining all the limitations (sizing, etc) and my suggestions for making the piece as successful as possible. I look over all of the reference that the client has gathered together, and I sometimes make some very rough sketches to make sure that both of us are on the same page with regard to the imagery. After our discussion, the deposit is paid and an appointment is booked for the piece to be tattooed.



Reference Gathering

Appointments are typically one to three months after the initial consultation; I do all of my work in chronological order. Two or three days prior to the appointment I will begin hunting down my own reference based on what the client has brought to me. As an artist, I know what will work best and I always try to avoid using Google or other people's tattoos as reference. Under no circumstances will I ever agree to replicate an existing tattoo like-for-like. I gather together not only the imagery that I like, but also interesting colour schemes and anything else I think will help me to create a unique piece.

Initial Sketches

Now that my reference is in hand I begin to flesh out my design. Depending on its complexity, and how my drawing head is that day, this can take anything between one and four hours. I draw in multi-layered colours to help me tighten the design as I go. This stage is frustrating and fun in equal measures. It's where the personality of the piece starts to take shape.

Ink Lines

Once I'm fairly confident with my initial drawing, I scan the piece into Photoshop and make any minor adjustments that need to be made. The sketch lines are then printed out and I begin to use fine liners to tighten the design once again. As I do this I try to think about how the piece will be tattooed, and use a variety of line weights to keep things dynamic. These lines will eventually become my stencil.

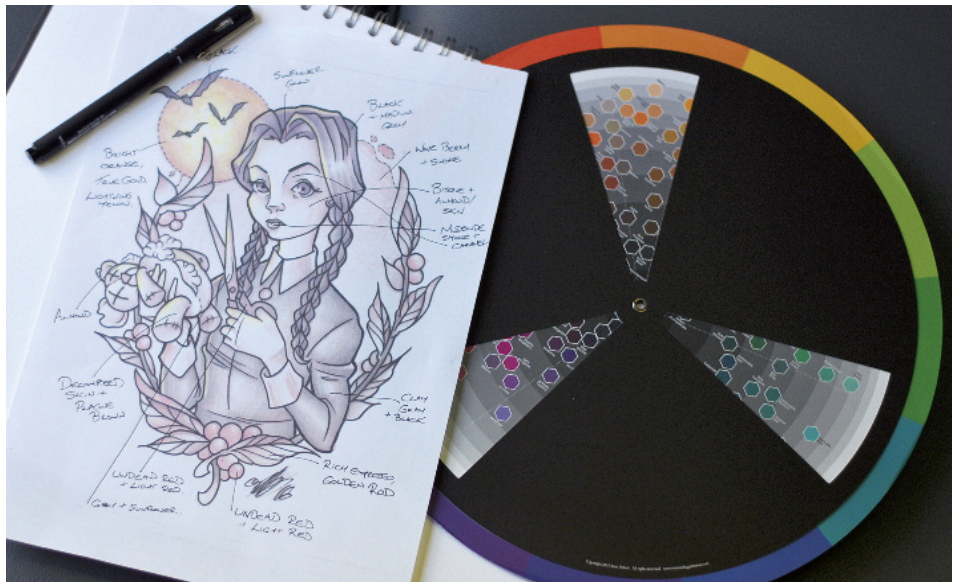


Finished Design

Some rough shading is then added to my ink lines. It is still by no means a high quality finished piece of art, but these shades help me block out my colours and understand where my blacks need to be. It also helps me to confirm that the piece is well-balanced both in weight and composition. It is at this point that the design is emailed to the customer for their approval.

Colour Study

On the morning of our appointment I will sit down with a copy of the piece and begin to map out my colour scheme. I tend to only use Eternal Inks, and my Abbott Colour Wheel really helps to make short work of this. By this point the design is so clearly planned out in my head that there is very little stress attached to the actual tattooing process.



Set-Up

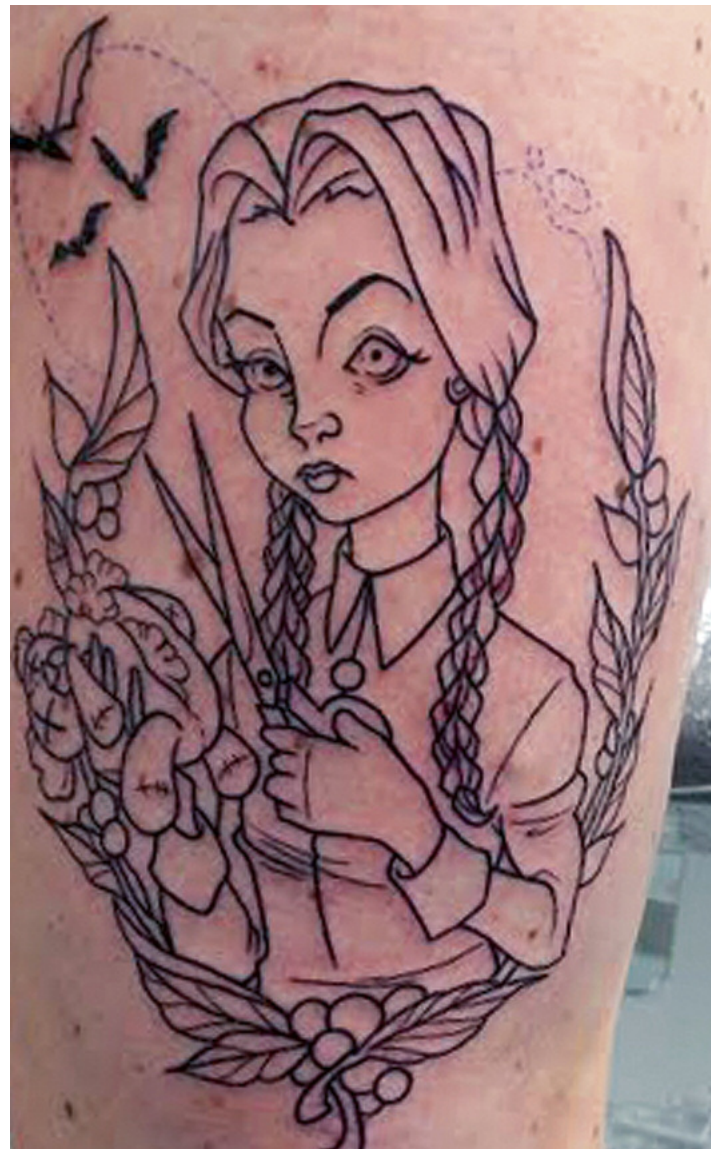
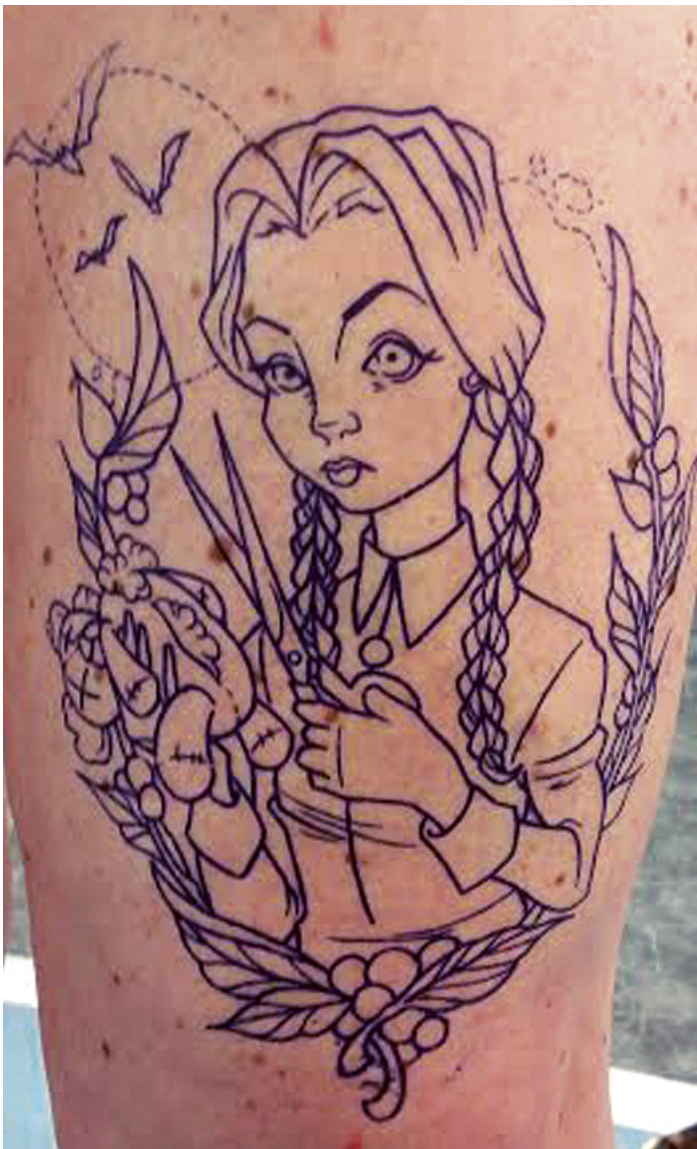
It's time to get ready for tattooing. I take a great deal of time and care to ensure that my tattooing area is hygienic and organised, that all surfaces are covered and sterile, and that my machines are running efficiently. Client safety is just as important as producing a high quality tattoo!

Stencil Application

When the client arrives for their appointment, the skin is prepped with a razor and surgical spirit. The stencil is offered up, applied, and left to set for a good fifteen minutes. Due to the line-dependent nature of my designs, it's really important that my stencil can last for the duration of the outlining process.

Linework

Finally the tattooing can begin. We start by getting the linework down on the piece. This includes multiple weight lines, colour lines, and any power lines (bolder lines to enhance certain elements of the design).





Blackwork

Before I begin playing with my colours, I put down a black base which gives the piece contrast and actually enhances the vibrancy of my colours once they go down on top. Due to the subject matter, this piece in particular required a fair amount of work at this stage, but it varies from design to design.



Colours

Now for my favourite part, the colours! Using my plans from that morning I begin to apply my colours to the tattoo. It can be a fairly time-consuming process to solidly colour a piece of this size, but the tattoo looks more and more complete with every element so it's also the most exciting bit for me! White highlights are added as a finishing touch and we leave the tattoo to rest for half an hour or so before it's photographed. By this time, the client has usually been in the studio for around eight hours.



Re-touch Session

The majority of tattoos tend to heal up pretty well if aftercare procedures are properly followed, but there are always things that can be strengthened on a healed tattoo. Certain colours don't always take so well and require a second pass, and this varies from person to person. This is usually done a month or so after the initial appointment. In Naomi's case there wasn't too much work that needed to be done.

Healed Photographs

Getting healed photographs of my work is sadly a rarity due to the schedules of my clients and sometimes the distances that they have travelled. In this case, Naomi was kind enough to pop in so that I could get a few shots.

And We're Done

There you have it. That is pretty much my standard process for creating a custom tattoo for a client from start to finish. It's worth noting that it's almost four months from initial consultation to the final healed photos, so something like this is certainly not an impulse decision. It's a commitment for both the client and the artist, and hopefully the effort from both parties shows.

NAOMI'S Q&A

Could you give us a brief description of your tattoo history?

I got my first tattoos when I was 18 – nothing special, just your typical walk-into-any-studio-and-pick-a-bit-of-flash-off-the-wall. I waited almost ten years before I got tattooed again and, thankfully, by then I was a but more clued up as to the kind of artwork and the quality of tattoo that I wanted. I've spent the last ten years collecting some really lovely pieces from some amazing artists (and getting those earlier tattoos covered!)

Do you feel the mass media have put an unrealistic spin on tattoo culture?

Absolutely. From what I've seen, it appears that the media haven't focused on tattoo culture at all. The focus seems to be on sensationalism and exploiting people who perhaps haven't made the best tattoo decisions, rather than showcasing the real quality of art and the talent of artists out there. It also perpetuates the myth that every tattoo has to have some form of deeper meaning (a personal bugbear of mine).

How does a real custom tattoo experience compare to the process portrayed within the media?

In the media it's made to seem that you can turn up at any time, to any studio, where your chosen artist will always be available. After the briefest of chats they will turn out a custom drawing (in a matter of seconds) which they will tattoo on you there and then in a super speedy fashion. The reality is a little different. After doing your research, you turn up at your chosen studio for a consultation with your chosen artist (a consultation that you most likely had to book a few weeks in advance). You have a proper conversation about the type of work that you'd like to get, after which you make an appointment, depending on your artist's waiting list and availability, and they work on drawing up your custom piece. A few weeks, or even months, later you turn up for your tattoo and spend a long period of time sitting very still, usually in a pretty uncomfortable position, most likely in some degree of pain and with minimal 'comfort' breaks. You'll probably end your day bloody, sore and exhausted but absolutely thrilled with your new tattoo. Apparently this process doesn't make good TV.

Do you find it frustrating that the process is so drawn out, or do you find the amount of work that goes into a piece reassuring?

I think it's really important to be patient when you start the process of having a custom tattoo. You have to understand that a lot of work and creativity goes into creating your piece, and various factors can affect how long it takes. I am always reassured by this, because I believe that when someone puts a lot of time and effort into something they become invested in it too and you end up with a quality piece of art.



Given the opportunity, is there anything that you would change about the process from a client's point of view?

Other than the pain, I don't think I'd change anything.

What advice would you offer to a tattoo virgin looking to get their first piece of artwork?

Research, research, research. Do your homework, ask questions, be patient. Bear in mind that just because someone is on TV or has tattooed celebrities it doesn't actually mean they're any good. Also, don't be that person who refuses to wait for an appointment and goes to their cousin's best mate's uncle's neighbour, Dave, who tattoos out of his kitchen (even though he has no clue what he's doing) just because he was cheaper and could do it straight away. Get your tattoo from that amazing artist you spent months researching. You get the tattoo you deserve.

A little about me...

My name is Chris Sutton and I have been a resident artist at Flaming Art Tattoo for four years. I prefer to work on bright and colourful illustrative pieces and like to draw each design from scratch as a unique creation for each of my clients. You can follow my work and contact me via the following:

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Tel 01322 559992
Email chrisflamingart@gmail.com
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Words and Pictures by Marco Annunziata

IRON PIRATE

MOTORCYCLES

IURI CASTALDI

Somewhere in the Tuscan countryside, between Florence and Pisa, you'll find a custom bike builder who can turn machines into dreams...

Hi Iuri. Are you the Iron Pirate?

Yes, that's me. I'm a big-bearded forty year old Italian, born in Tuscany with Southern blood, and I'm always riding a motorcycle to bike shows, concerts and tattoo conventions, come rain or shine.

How did you get into customising bikes?

My father's an expert in automotive electrics. He has a huge passion (and great skills) for customising everything, and I've learned a lot from him. I did all kinds of jobs – tyres, autobody repairs, welding, etc – before opening my own shop. I worked for Ford and Renault, and I was a foreman at Chrysler. I always wanted to work somewhere where I could customise bikes for cool customers all day... but I had to do other jobs to pay the bills!

That's because you're in the middle of nowhere in the Tuscan countryside! Shouldn't you move to a big city?

Are you kidding? This is heaven! I feel so lucky that my parents decided to move here. I love the countryside. I'm only twenty minutes away from the beach, and in about half an hour I can be in the mountains. There's almost no pollution, and you can have great organic food and wine every day. What more could I ask for? I've never liked big cities. I'm not a businessman and I don't think I could find any kind of inspiration where things go too fast. And to be honest, I really like the fact that my customers have to come and find me. That's how I know if they really want to get a bike from me!



Rino Valente, one of the most respected tattoo artists in Italy. Rino taught me everything I know about tattooing and he eventually covered all these ugly things with some great solid traditional tattoos. We became super close, worked on a few art projects together and I made him a great bike!

Is he the one who did the shark on your chest?

Yes, he's the one. I love this shark so much that I asked my painter friend Ricky Brofini to paint it on this gas tank that I'll use for one of my bikes.

Who are your favorite tattoo artists?

Everything I do is done in an old school way, so it's the same with tattoos. I like traditional tattooers who make pirates' and sailors' stuff. I really don't get all these new fancy tattoos. I like tattoo artists who can make simple and bold designs that last your whole life, things that don't go out of style. To name just a few of them: Rino Valente, Manopola, Rotor, El Monga, Gigi Fagni, Pialla, Moroko Gon...

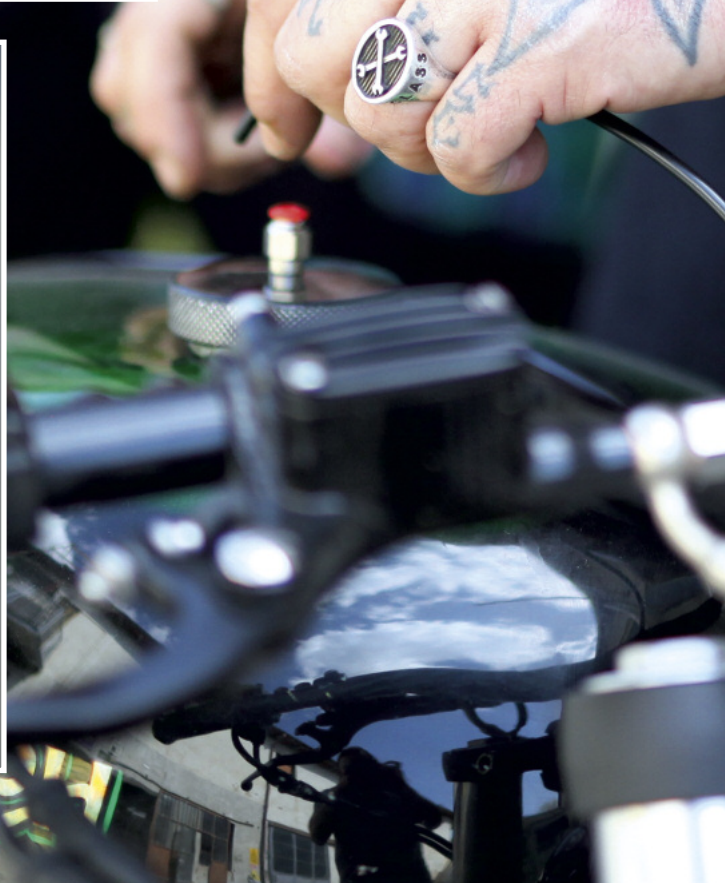
So who was the first customer who found you?

Simone Sardi, a friend of mine who's a professional motocross rider. For him, I made a minimal rat style sportster that we brought to the Hills Race event in Pavia. People loved it and Rider Magazine featured it with a full article! I would say that was the day Iron Pirate was born.

What about tattoos? When did you start getting inked?

I started at fifteen years old, getting shitty tattoos from some random guys at motorcycle events around Europe. After a while I met



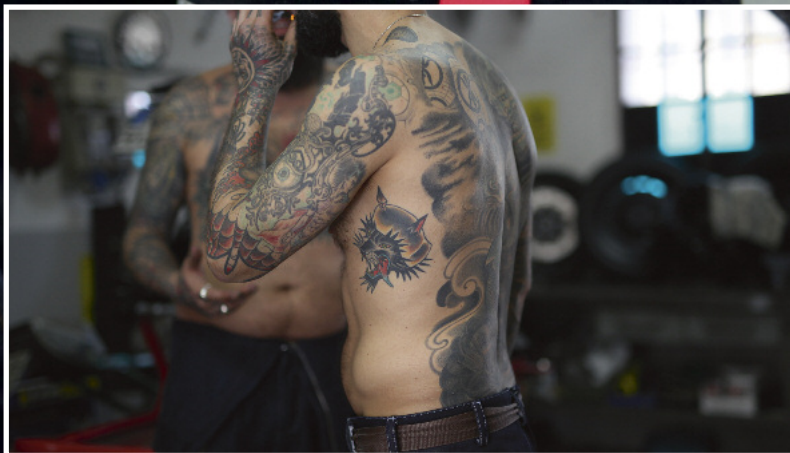


What about motorcycles? What are your favaourites?

That's an impossible question! After all these years, I can work on almost any bike. I think all bikes have some hidden custom potential and I love to find it in superbikes, motocross bikes, Triumph, Ducati, Japanese bikes, and of course Harley Davidson. I'm about to start on a brand new one that my dad just got from the HD shop.

What are the bikes we shot today?

We shot a Triumph Bonneville T100 Brat Style with high-end finishings. This is one of the three bikes I made for my friend Andrea Guarducci. The other one is a Triumph Speed Triple T301 Classic Cafe Racer that I made for Samuele Senesi.



You have a lot of work here! What do you do when you're not in the shop?

I like to travel. I've travelled everywhere in Europe. I've been to California many times and I'm planning a long trip to Japan. I love live music and I don't mind if the gigs I want to go to are far away – I just get on my bike and go.

And I bet you're always thinking about some new project?

True. I'm finishing a Triumph Speed Triple T310 from the 70s, a Ducati SS750, a Triumph Daytona Cafe Racer, and turning a Yamaha XT into a 70s motocross bike.

iuri666rider@libero.it

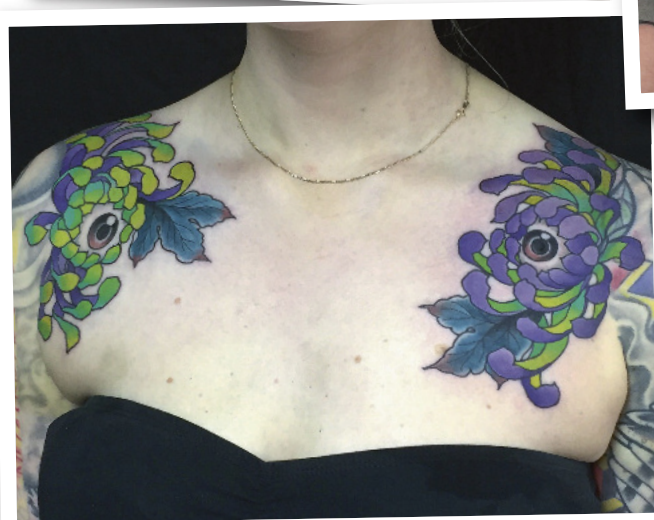
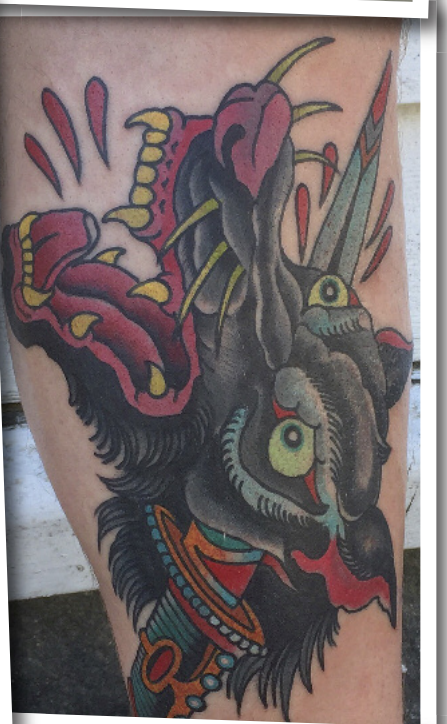
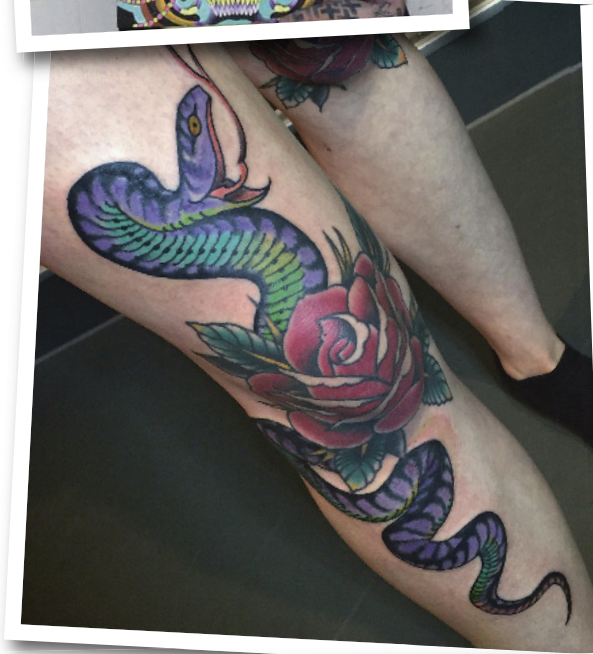
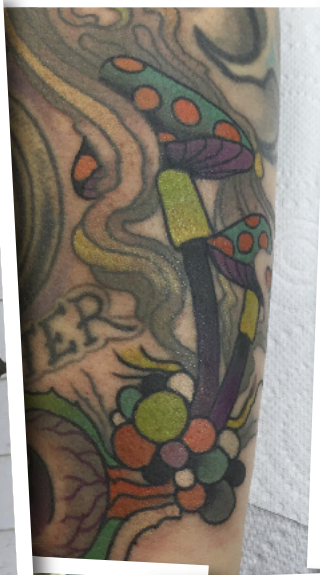
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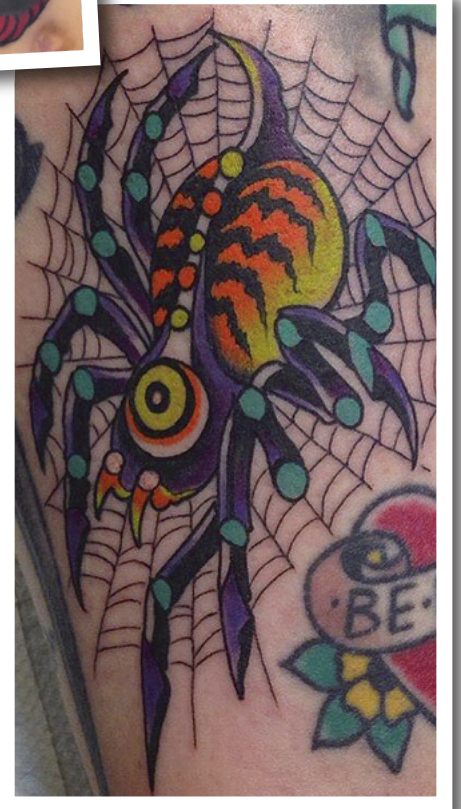
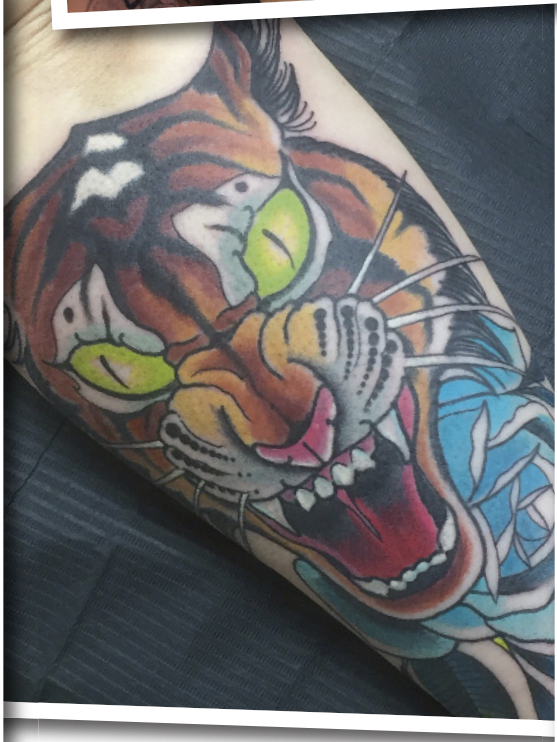
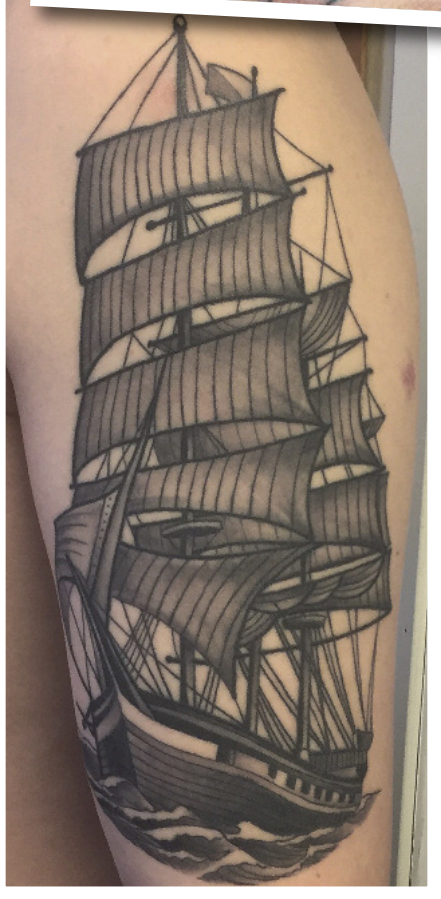
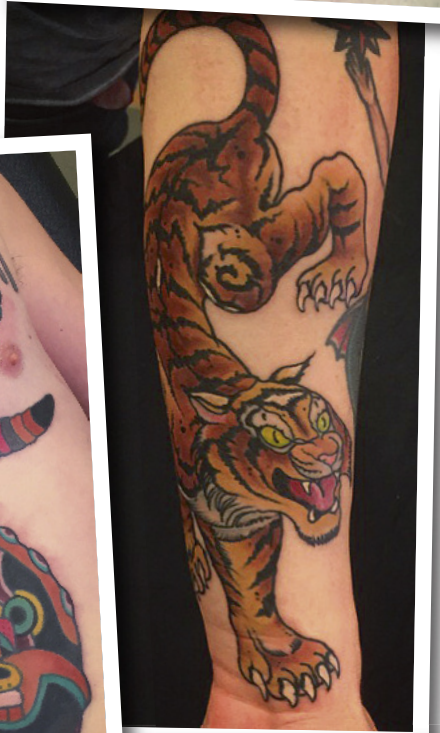
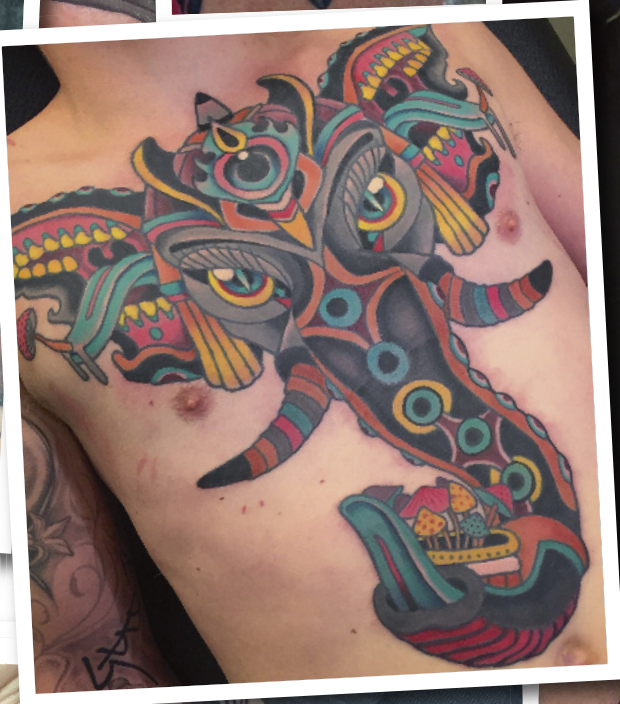
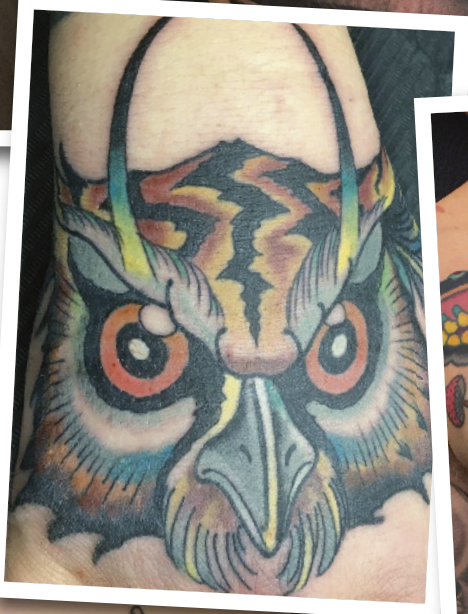
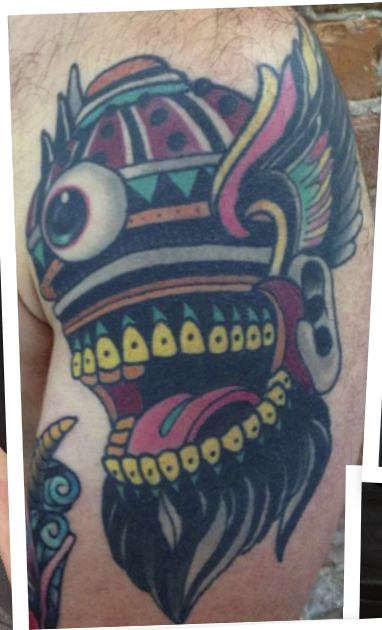


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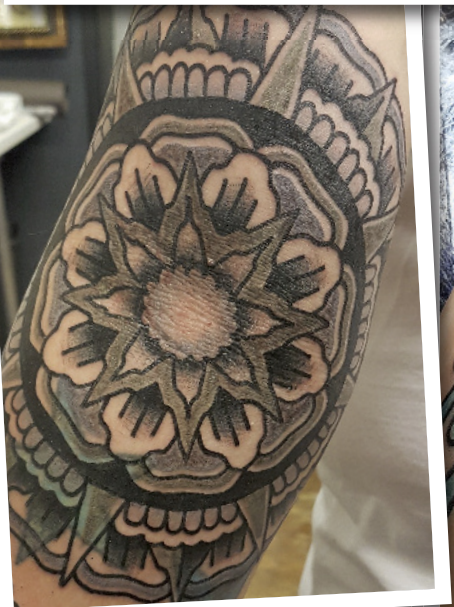
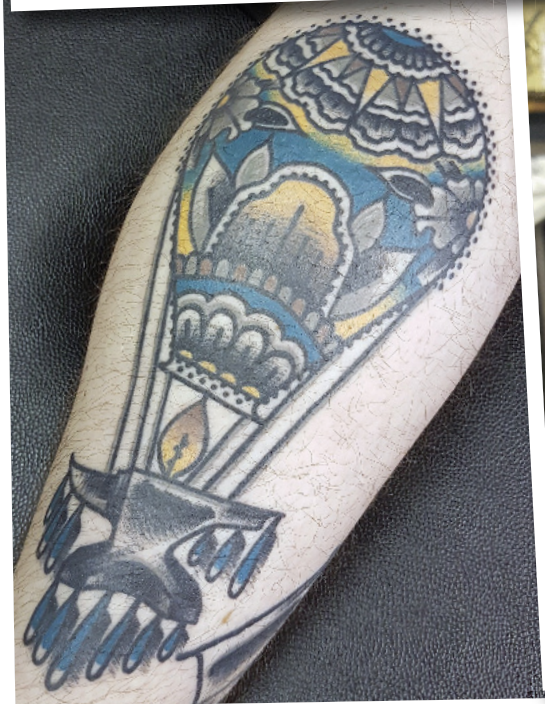
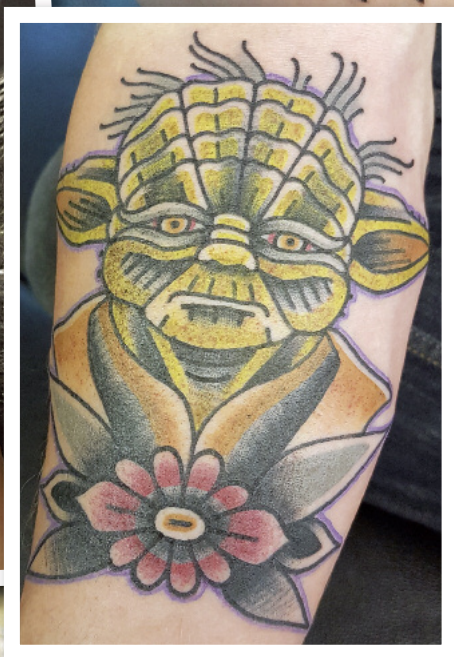
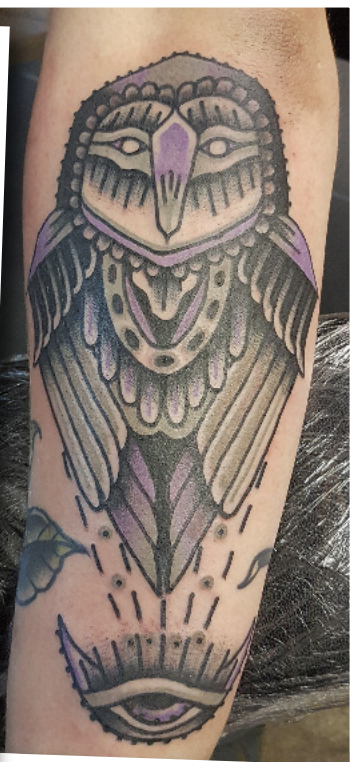
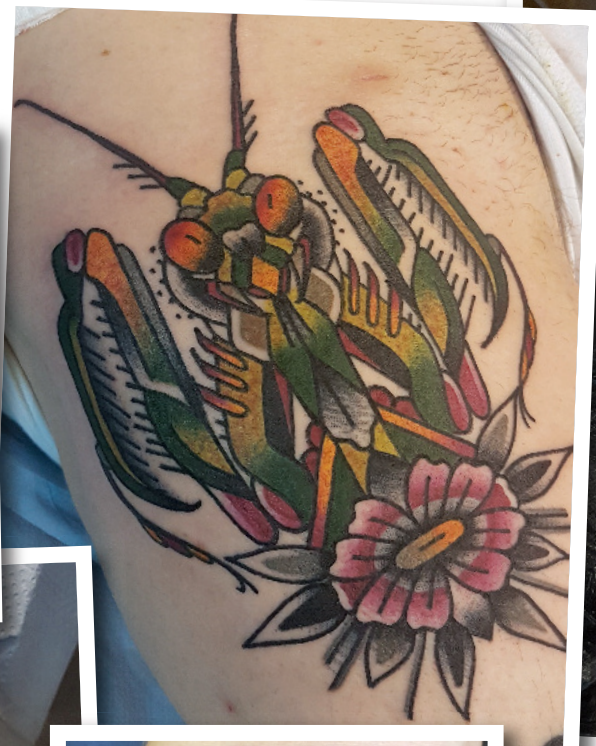
ALEJO LOMBARDI SOLID TATTOO (NORWAY)

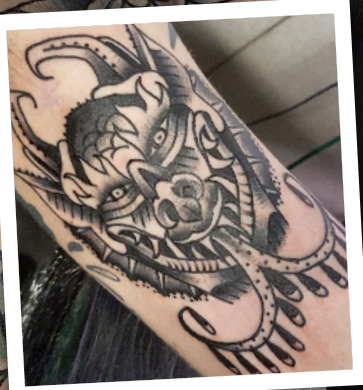
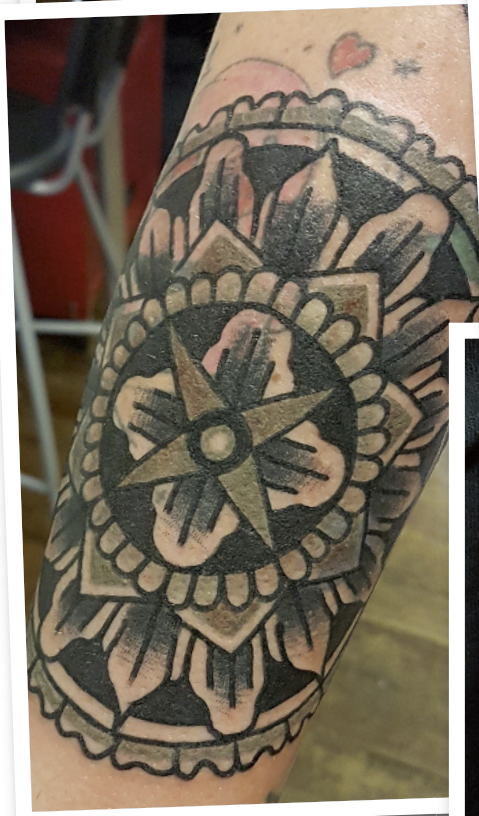




OLI SUGARS

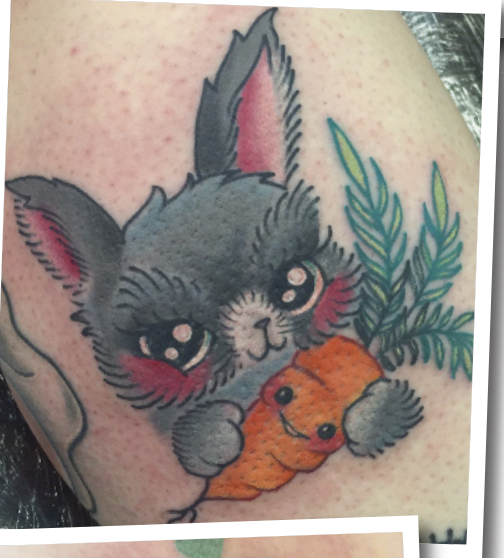
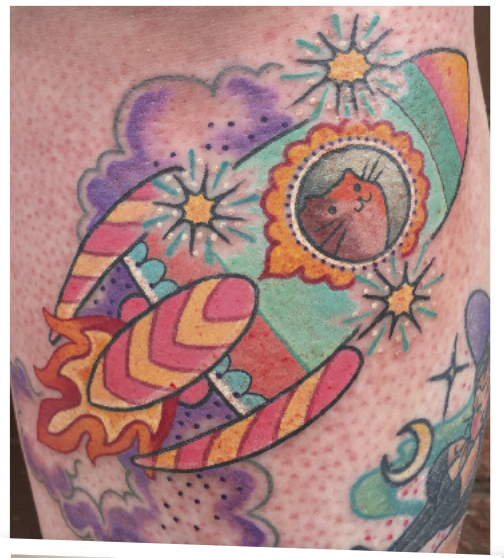
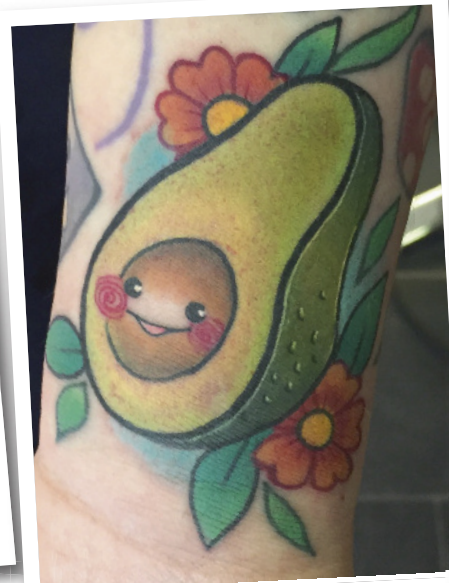
MAGNUM OPUS TATTOO

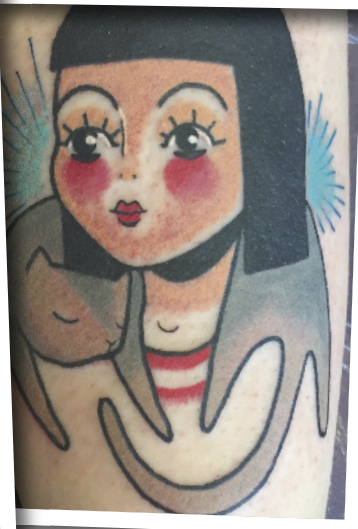
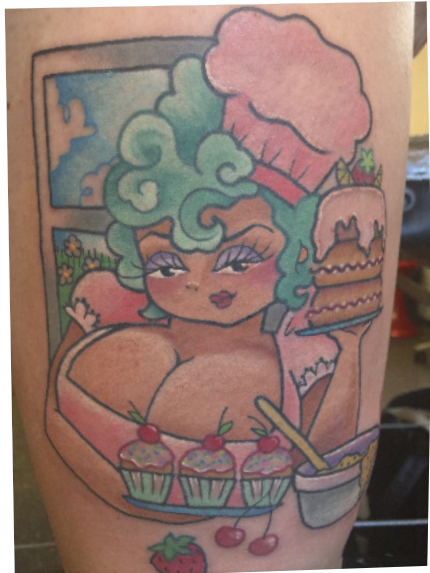




HOLLIE WEST

INDIGO TATTOO







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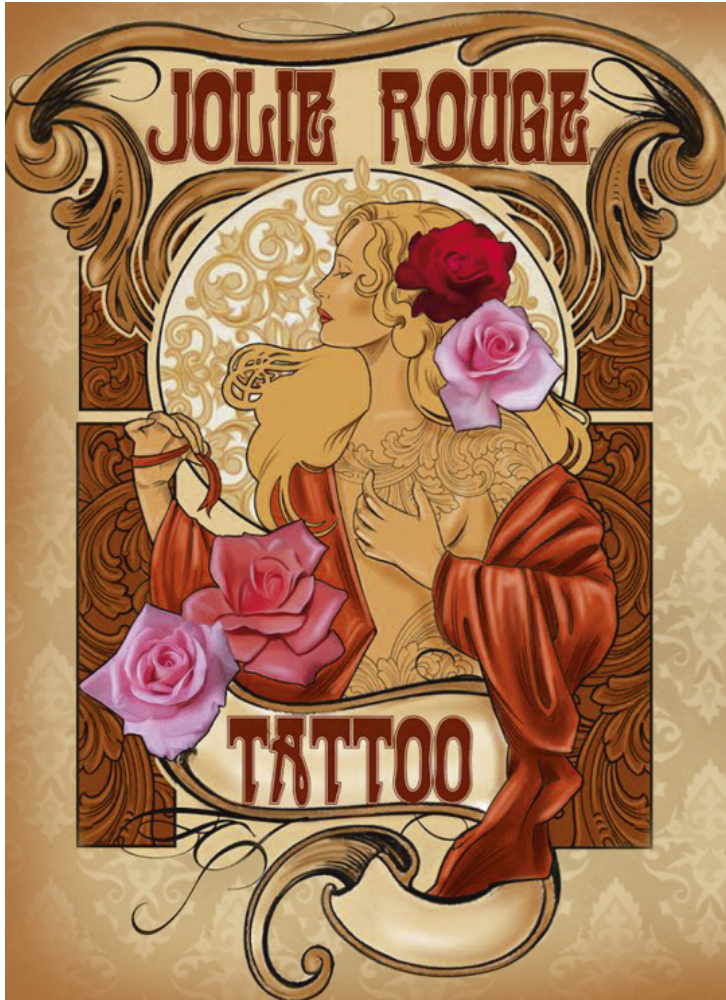
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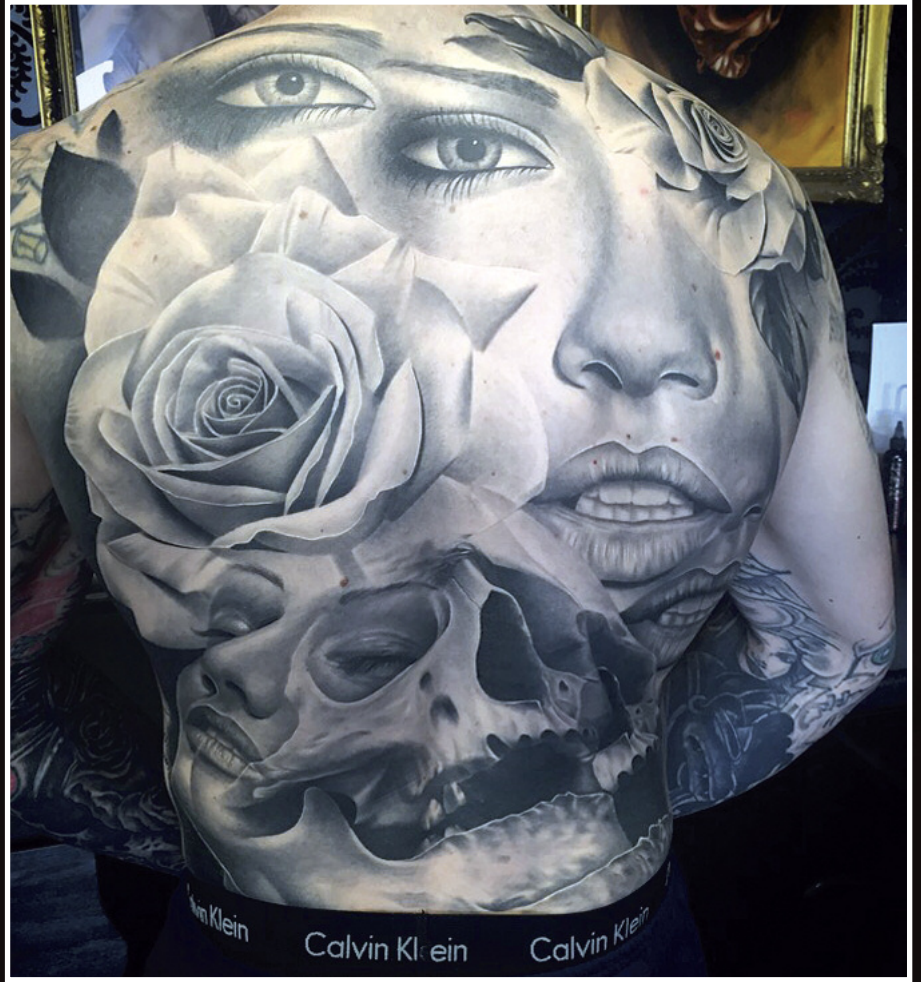
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Artists

Matt Difa - Antonio Gabriele - Clara Sinclair
Lord Montana Blue - Keely Rutherford
Maharanii

Interview by Perry
Photos by Willy G





Willy G

TATTOO



Things have moved fast for Willy G. It was only a few years ago that he first picked up a tattoo machine, but he's already soared to the top of the realism game, won numerous awards and opened his own studio. I was fortunate to meet him on a recent trip to Ireland, and we managed to squeeze an interview into his busy schedule...

Tell us about your studio...

Willy G Tattoo is on the north east coast of Ireland, about thirty minutes away from Belfast. My shop is right by the sea. You could throw a stone from my door into the water. I made the decision not to go into the city, and to stay away from the other shops, the politics and the drama. There are no other tattoo shops in this town, and no walk-in trade. I work with two other tattooists. We all tattoo in the same room and it's a good atmosphere. I've built up my studio like a family and I've always looked after the guys who work with me. We're all human beings and we all need respect.

How did you become a tattooist?

Looking back at my school reports, art was the one thing I was consistently good at. I didn't like school. I wasn't a bad kid, but I didn't like being confined in the classroom. I would get bored and agitated. I just wanted to go out and work. I don't know where my love of tattoos came from. I always loved getting tattooed, but it never occurred to me that I could do it. And then one day when I was watching, I just thought 'I could do that!' and I decided to give it a go. It was six years before I got offered a break in a shop. Most people would have given up by then. But I worked day and night. I'd be up at six or seven in the morning just to practice. I travelled around the world getting tattooed by top artists, so that

I could watch them. It cost me a fortune! But everyone was nice and answered my questions, because I'd given them the respect of money, flying over and staying over. That was my learning curve.

Why did you choose to specialise in black and grey realism?

In the first shop where I worked, there was the boss, another guy and me. The other guy preferred colour and I liked black and grey... so it just happened that he got the colour work and I got the black and grey. No other reason! The more I did it, the more it became my thing, and the more people wanted it. I do colour work occasionally, but black and grey is what I love.

Roses feature heavily in your work. What's the attraction?

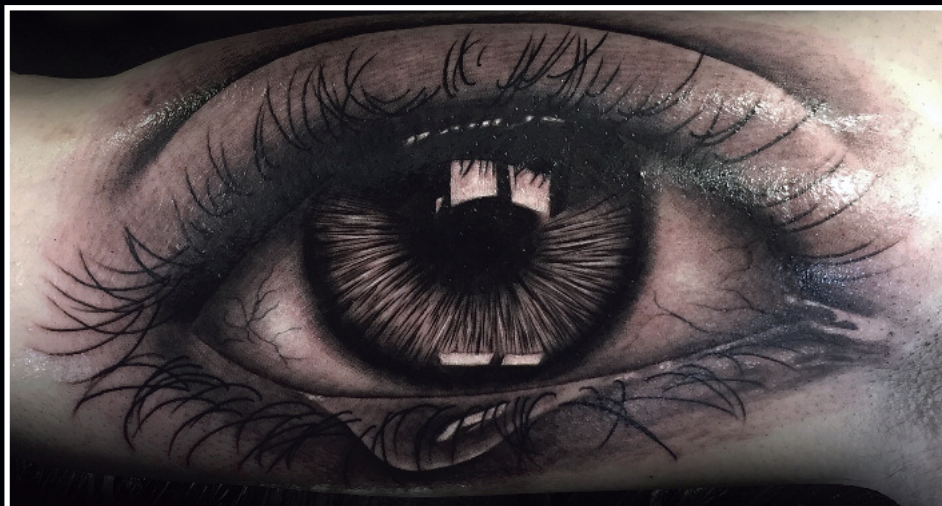
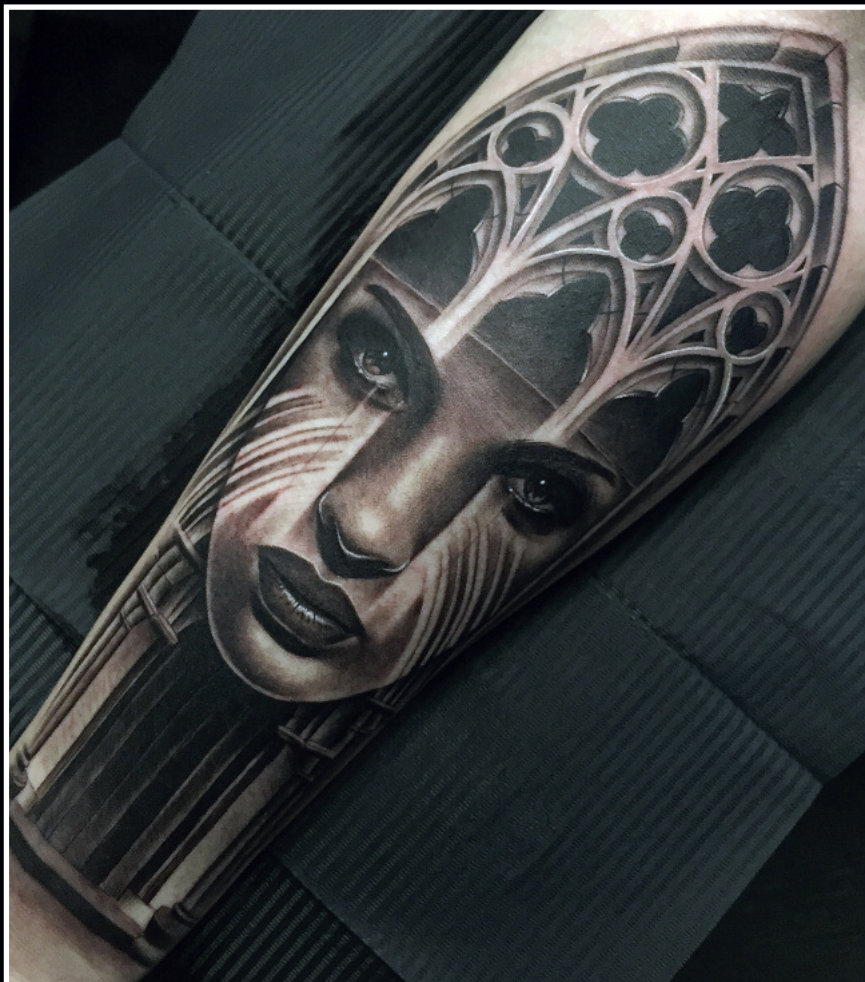
There's no denying roses are very popular in tattooing, and you see them done in so many styles. I think they are the most beautiful flower, and they also make a fantastic tattoo. A soft folded-over petal with the light hitting it, casting a dark shadow below... I love how the light source can give the tattoo contrast and depth, which is very important to me. Even in black and grey realism, you can take a rose and really put your own stamp on it. Roses have become a signature of mine and most people can tell a rose that I've done.

What would you say is the most challenging element in creating a black and grey realism piece?

The key word is balance. You have to find a way of creating a realistic looking tattoo that will also stand the test of time. You don't want it to look good on the day then disappear in only a few years, so sometimes you have to sacrifice a little percentage of the realism to give it longevity. With things like water drops in roses, if I don't think it's gonna be there in twenty years, I won't put it in. When I tattoo I'm constantly thinking about how it will heal and how it will look in ten years' time. You also have to strike a balance with the shading. Some parts you will want to tattoo very smooth, but for realism you need to add texture when required. The light source is very important; you must always remember where the light is coming from. I always work from dark to light. A black and grey tattoo can't be good if it doesn't have enough black in it, so once I've done the black I'll stand back and look at it, to check. I've started exaggerating the blacks, making big shadows. I know when it's got enough black in to stand the test of time. Then I start putting in soft tones and soft blends. The flow is important too. All tattoos should flow with the shape of the body.

That kind of knowledge usually only comes with time, but you've only been tattooing for a few years...

I respect the older generation. They paved the way for us. I was in Miami with Ami James; he's fixed me up with a guest spot with Tim Hendricks because I wanted to learn. I always want to soak up information. I think I got lucky that I got into tattooing when realism was really just starting. I started doing the solid line stuff, then one day I decided to make a rose as realistic as I could. And I shocked myself at how good it was. I do have haters. But I don't bad mouth anybody. I've got to where I am in four years because of dedication and passion. In fact, I love haters, they fuel me to do better! If you haven't got haters, you're not doing well.



Do you find that there's a pressure to be consistently good?

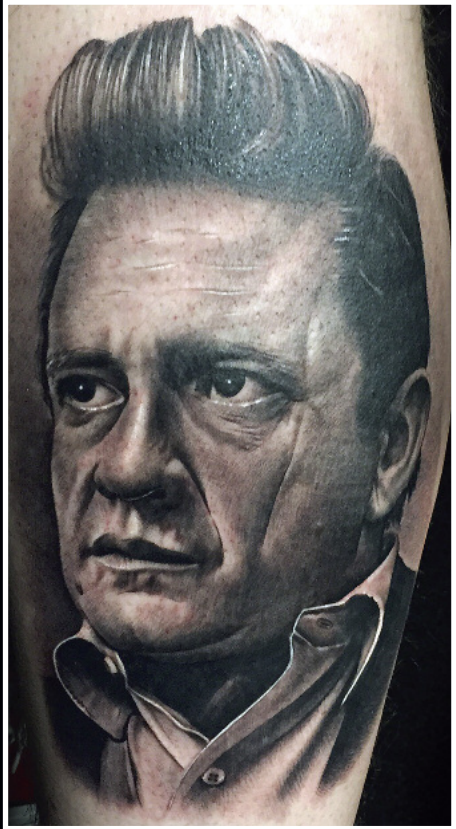
Yes, and I think it's a good thing, because a tattoo is on you for the rest of your life. Too many artists try to take on what they can't handle. And too many artists don't seem to care about the customer. My customers are my life. I mean, I live a good life, but it's 100% down to my customers. You need to look after your customers and give them what they want to the best of your knowledge and ability. I'm really fortunate that my customers listen to me and trust me.

Are you competitive? Do you think about all the artists who are coming up behind you?

No. I only look at the artists who are ahead of me. If you're in a sprint and you look behind, you lose your pace. You've got to keep looking forwards. I look at people who I aspire to be like. There's a lot of negativity in this game, and a lot of backstabbing. You don't need it in your life. I don't tattoo for money; I tattoo because I love doing what I do. When you love something that much, you work hard at it and put all your efforts into it.

How do you see the future of realism?

For me, it's important that we keep thinking about longevity – and not try to be too realistic. We're tattoo artists. We're not painting pictures. Let's not get too carried away with hyper-realism and making things look super shiny with lots of white that won't be there in the long term. Loads has changed in just five years, so it's exciting to think where it could go, but realism is what it is. It's not a fad. It isn't gonna change. What worries me, though, is that we all use the same sources on the Internet, so in the future we're going to look back and see the same women's faces hundreds of times... Lots of tattooists just find images and use them; they don't think about important things like the light source.



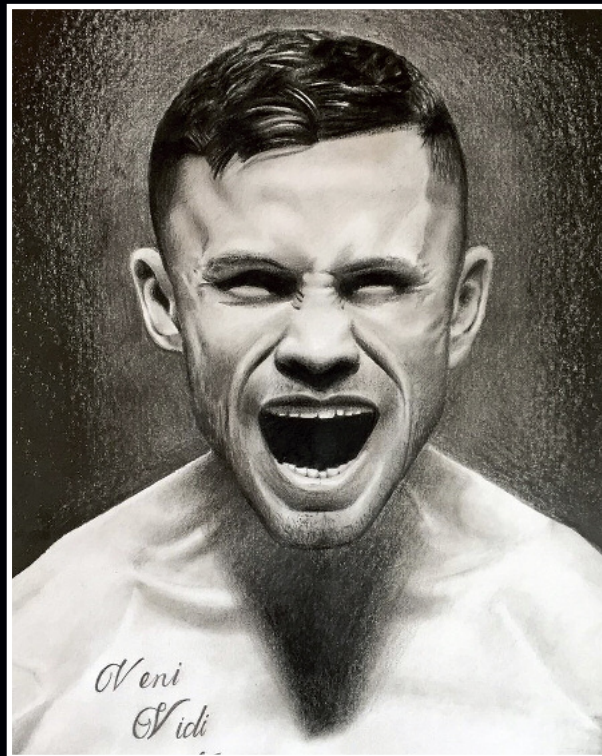
What's the next step for you?

I'm aiming to get to the stage where I'm able to sketch directly onto the skin.

That seems achievable, as you also make incredibly detailed pencil drawings.

Yes, my favourite medium is pencil. I find it really soothing. I do use Photoshop of course, but it's more of a convenience thing.



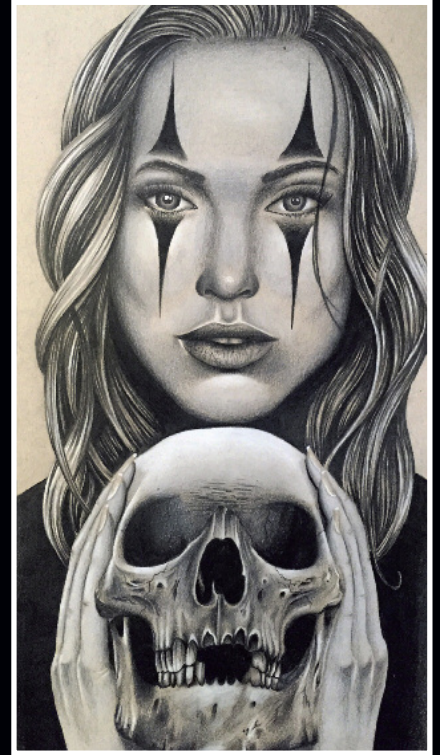


Where do you find your creative inspiration?

Everywhere in life. Travelling is a big factor. For instance when I'm in Milan, I like to visit the Duomo. It's the largest cathedral in Italy and it has so many sculptures, both inside and out. Photos of sculptures make fantastic tattoo reference. I have plans to tattoo in other countries in Europe, and also South America and Australia, and I'm looking forward to seeing what new references I can find to bring into my work. Social media is also great, as I can follow my peers. I'm lucky to be good friends with some amazing artists; every day they inspire me to push myself and do better. I hope that in return I inspire others. My customers also inspire me to keep creative. They put their trust in me, so it's up to me to be prepared.

Do you have a good work-life balance?

It's a constant struggle to find the right balance between tattooing and family life. My family means everything to me, but I also eat, sleep and breathe tattooing. It's not a job for me; it's a way of life. But I always try to find time for my family. I have a two young daughters who mean the world to me and I don't want to miss them growing up. That's the hardest thing about travelling! My kids miss me a lot. Everything I do is for them. They are the driving force that makes me want to succeed. My wife is very understanding about the long hours I dedicate to tattooing. She has always believed in me and I'm very thankful for this. She respects what I do, and tattooing has become a big part of her life too. I made her my shop manager and my kids call in every day to see me, so it's very much a family business.



Tell us about a day in the life of Willy G...

I get up and do the school run... I really like being able to do that. My studio is just around the corner, so I'm in work for about 9am then my customers arrive at 9.30. I tattoo all day, then I go home and try to spend a few hours with my kids. Once they go to bed, I'm back designing for the next day or else working on a piece of art – either a drawing or a painting. This can take me to the early hours of the next morning. I don't watch much television. When I'm doing nothing at all, I feel like it's a waste of valuable time.



What's the most important lesson life has taught you?

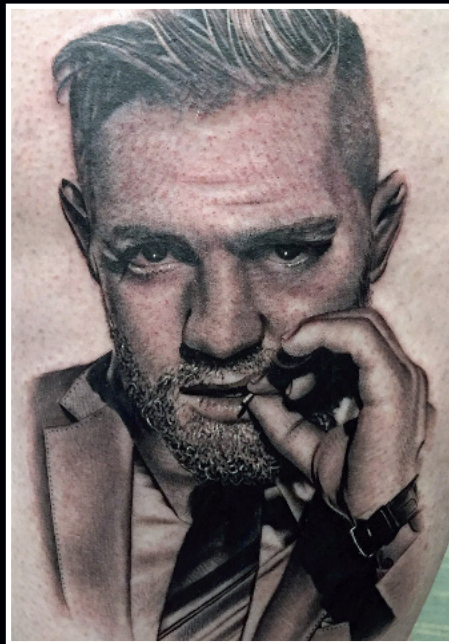
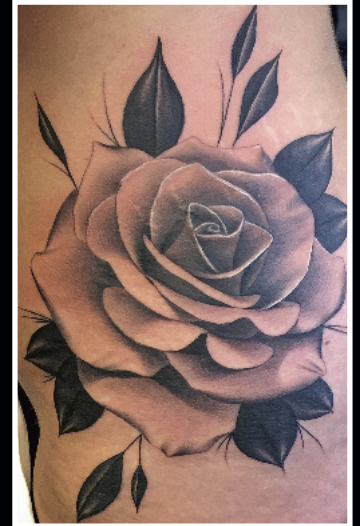
The biggest lesson I've learnt is to take your time. You can't rush art. Especially not tattoos, where there's no room for error. I'm a perfectionist. I like to do the best job I can, no matter how long it takes. Michelangelo took four years to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling. There really is no rush when it comes to art.

You're a very positive person...

Yes, I'm a real positive thinker. I can't stand negativity. If someone is negative around me, or on social media, they're gone. If you surround yourself with positive people it's going to help your life. Bob Marley said, 'The greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively'. Last year I had a call from my old school, asking if I wanted to come in and teach the kids how to draw in black and grey. I'm going to do that for free. I'm a massive believer in giving back. I love inner satisfaction and I love helping people. It's a circle; the more you give the more you get.

Where does your drive come from?

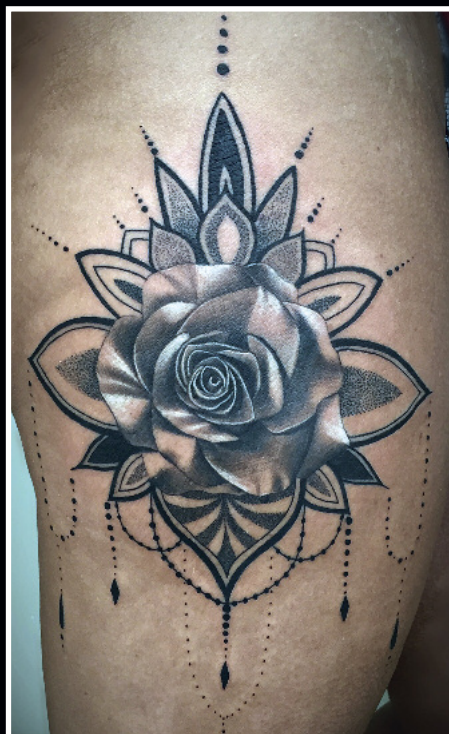
I think it's from my Mum. She's French. She came here unable to speak a word of English and got a job washing dishes; now she has a very high class job. I remember her doing a university course when I was a kid and passing everything with distinctions. Whatever she did in life, she worked so hard. I get my work ethic from her. Nothing held her back.



And what does the future hold for Willy G?

I'd really like to do more large-scale work. More back pieces would be nice, but the ultimate goal would be body suits. I'd love to design a tattoo that covers most of the body. It would be amazing to utilise the shape of the body in the design right from the start, and really make it flow. To stand back when it's complete and see one large design – where the customer has committed so much of their body to your art – would be an honour. For me, the future is all about improving. I'm still very young in the game, and there's so much more for me to learn. That's my fundamental rule. The day you stop learning is the day you give up. I'm so excited because what I've achieved in four years is just crazy. I plan to keep working hard, improve every day, and constantly try to raise my standard of tattooing. I always strive to create better pieces. I'm really enjoying life at the moment. I plan to travel more, with guest spots and conventions. And I have a few other things in the pipeline for the future but I'll keep them under wraps for now...

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TALES FROM THE 'NAUGHTY' STEP

by Paul Talbot

Hello again dear readers.

Before I bend your ear about what's been bothering me this month, I'm going to tell you a story. A few years ago I was dragged along to a local theatre to watch an am-dram rock opera. A friend's daughter was performing, and I felt duty bound to support her. Needless to say, it was dreadful. She was actually OK. But the play? Oh dear... The biggest problem was the premise of the whole thing. A very grandiose plot about the life, loves and times of a band. Not a famous band, but an unheard-of local act which (as far as I could ascertain from the mainly incoherent rambling that was the dialogue) had never done anything more noteworthy than nearly do a support slot at an almost-famous rock club back in the 1980s. The play failed because the writer, who happened to be a founding member of the aforementioned band, simply couldn't appreciate that his life story just wasn't the kind of material that would make a successful 3-hour long rock opera.

So why am I telling you this?

Well recently I've noticed a trend amongst clients – not just my own, but also those of the other artists that I've spoken to – where they seem to want to try to make their tattoo “all about me and my life”. But an effective tattoo (or any piece of artwork for that matter) makes its point simply, and with the minimum of fuss. So if it takes a 37-page annotated PDF to explain the “concept” for your design (and yes, I have actually received that document – and no, I didn't read past page 2) you might want to rethink. Art is about communicating things in an abstract way that can make even the most mundane of subject matter spectacular. A literal visual translation of a concept is almost never successful.

So I've been wondering, where did this idea come from – that the reason for the tattoo

should get so literally translated into the subject matter of the piece? When did being able to tell people “what it means” become such a big part of just getting some cool artwork on your skin? And when did “What does it mean?” even become a question that you ask someone about a tattoo?

For the moment (and until someone gives me a better explanation) I'm going to blame the television, and the “tell us why you're getting this tattoo” bit on all those popular reality shows. I'm also going to blame social media, because it's making us far more narcissistic than any humans that have come before us. We have our own personal spaces and profiles that we carefully manicure in order to present the 'greatest hits' from our daily grind (and not the actual grind itself), presenting a carefully edited story about who we are and what we're all about. Every one of us is becoming a highly-skilled spin doctor with just

one client – ourselves. I think it's this never-ending obsession with showing the world a perfect, interesting and cool version of ourselves that's driving the current “it's got to be all about me and it has to have a meaning” tattoo trend.

For the clients that I'm talking about, what seems to matter is telling everyone about the meaning of their tattoo (and the life event that inspired it) – whereas in fact nobody really gives a damn because tattooing has NEVER been about the client and it's NEVER been about the artist. It's ALWAYS and ONLY ever been about the art itself. We've always had reasons to get tattoos, both good and bad, but until recently the subject itself was usually represented in a far more abstract and artistic way. Even old-time prison tattoos had more aesthetic value than some of the “concepts” that I've turned down recently. Spiders' webs that count years, chest crosses, playing card symbols... at least they're attempts at making something artistic out of something very simple – unlike things that read like descriptions of shit 1980s motivational posters, crap greetings cards or internet 'memes'.

These days, just walking in and picking something straight from the wall seems to be a thing of the past – but doing it that way wasn't necessarily a bad thing. At least it would be a cool, well thought out design drawn by a master of the style and not something as lame as the face of Jesus on a bit of toast done for a story on TV just because it “meant something”. Custom art has always given clients the opportunity to ‘spec’ something, but this used to mean choosing a basic theme and letting the artist do the rest. It's now gone way beyond that, with artists often being asked to pander to the whims of people who just need to be told “no” a little more often.

So before you approach a tattooist for a custom piece, ask yourself “Will this make a good piece of art, or am I just trying to project a fake version of myself in an attempt to convince the world, and myself, that I'm cool? Will my piece look like art... or a shit local rock opera?”

As always, this is my personal view. Email me and let me know what you think.

Until next time - Paul
talesfromthenaughtystep@gmail.com

CONVENTION CALENDAR

UK CONVENTIONS

November 12-13

East Coast Tattoo Expo

Highfield Holiday Park, London Road,
Clacton-On-Sea, Essex CO16 9QY
www.eastcoastexpo.co.uk

November 15-16

Sheffield Tattoo Show

Ice Sheffield, Coleridge Rd, Sheffield S9 5DA,
<http://sheffieldtattooshow.co.uk/>

December 3

Cariad Ink Tattoo Festival

Venue Cymru, The Promenade, Llandudno LL30
1BB
www.facebook.com/CariadInk

February 18-19

Frome Tattoo Convention

Cheese & Grain, Market Yard,
Frome BA11 1BE,
www.facebook.com/frometattoocon/

March 4-5

Tattoo Tea Party

EventCity, Phoenix Way, Barton Dock Rd,
Urmston, Manchester M41,
<http://www.tattooteaparty.com>

March 25-26

The Scottish Tattoo Convention

Edinburgh Corn Exchange, 10 New Market Rd
Edinburgh EH14 1RJ
<http://www.scottishtattooconvention.net>

April 15-16 2017

Maidstone Tattoo Extravaganza

The John Hendry Pavilion, Detling Showground,
Maidstone,
Kent ME14 3JF
www.maidstonetattooextravaganza.co.uk

April 29-30 2017

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The Big North Tattoo Show

The Metro Radio Arena, Arena Way, Newcastle
Upon Tyne NE4 7NA
www.facebook.com/bignorthtattooshow

April 29-30 2017

Lincs Ink Tattoo Convention

Beachcomber Holiday Park & Entertainment
Centre
208 North Sea Lane, Humberston,
Cleethorpes/Humberston DN36 4ET,
www.lincs-ink.co.uk

May 5-7

Liverpool Tattoo Convention

Adelphi Hotel, Ranelagh St, Liverpool L3 5UL
www.liverpooltattooconvention.com

May 13-14

Brighton Tattoo Convention

Brighton Centre, King's Rd, Brighton BN1 2GR
www.brightontattoo.com/
[@brightontattoocon](https://twitter.com/brightontattoocon)

May 13-14

Glasgow Tattoo Festival

The Studio, 8 Dixon St,
Glasgow G1 4AX,
www.facebook.com/GlasgowTattooFestival

May 27-28

Scarborough Tattoo Show

The Spa Scarborough, South Bay, Scarborough,
North Yorkshire YO11 2HD
www.scarboroughtattooshow.com

June 10-11

Bristol Tattoo Convention

The Passenger Shed, Station Approach,
Bristol BS1 6QH
www.bristoltattooconvention.com

June 24-25

York International Tattoo Convention

New Earswick & District Indoor Bowls Club,
Huntington Rd, York YO32 9PX,
yorkinternationaltattooconvention.co.uk

July 1-2

Cirque Du Tattoo Festival

Bescot Stadium, Bescot Cres, Walsall WS1 4SA,
www.facebook.com/cirquedutattoo

July 8-9

Leeds International Tattoo Expo

First Direct Arena, Arena Way, Leeds LS2 8BY
www.leedstattooexpo.com

July 15-16

Cardiff Tattoo and Toy Convention

The Motorpoint Arena Cardiff
Mary Ann Street
Cardiff CF10 2EQ,
www.cardiffattooandtoycon.co.uk

September 29-October 1

York International Tattoo Convention

Athena Leicester, Athena, Queen Street, LE1
1QD Leicester
www.facebook.com/Midlands-Tattoo-industry-Show-980219155377587

OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

November 11-13

International Brussels Tattoo Convention

Tour and Taxis, Brussels, Belgium
www.brusselstattooconvention.be

January 13-15

Goa Tattoo Festival

Tito's White House, Arpora-Siolim Road
Anjuna 403 509, India

March 3-5

Mondial du Tatouage

Grande halle de la Villette
211 Avenue Jean Jaurès, 75019 Paris, France
www.mondialdutatouage.com/en

26 - 28 May 2017

13th Amsterdam Tattoo Convention

Amsterdam RAI Exhibition and Convention
Centre, Europaplein, 1078 GZ Amsterdam,
Netherlands
www.tattooexpo.eu/en/amsterdam/2017

August 4-6

27th Berlin Tattoo Convention

Arena Berlin, Eichenstraße 4
12435 Berlin, Germany
www.tattoo-convention.de/tcb-final

July 15-17

NY Empire State Tattoo Expo

New York Hilton Midtown
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