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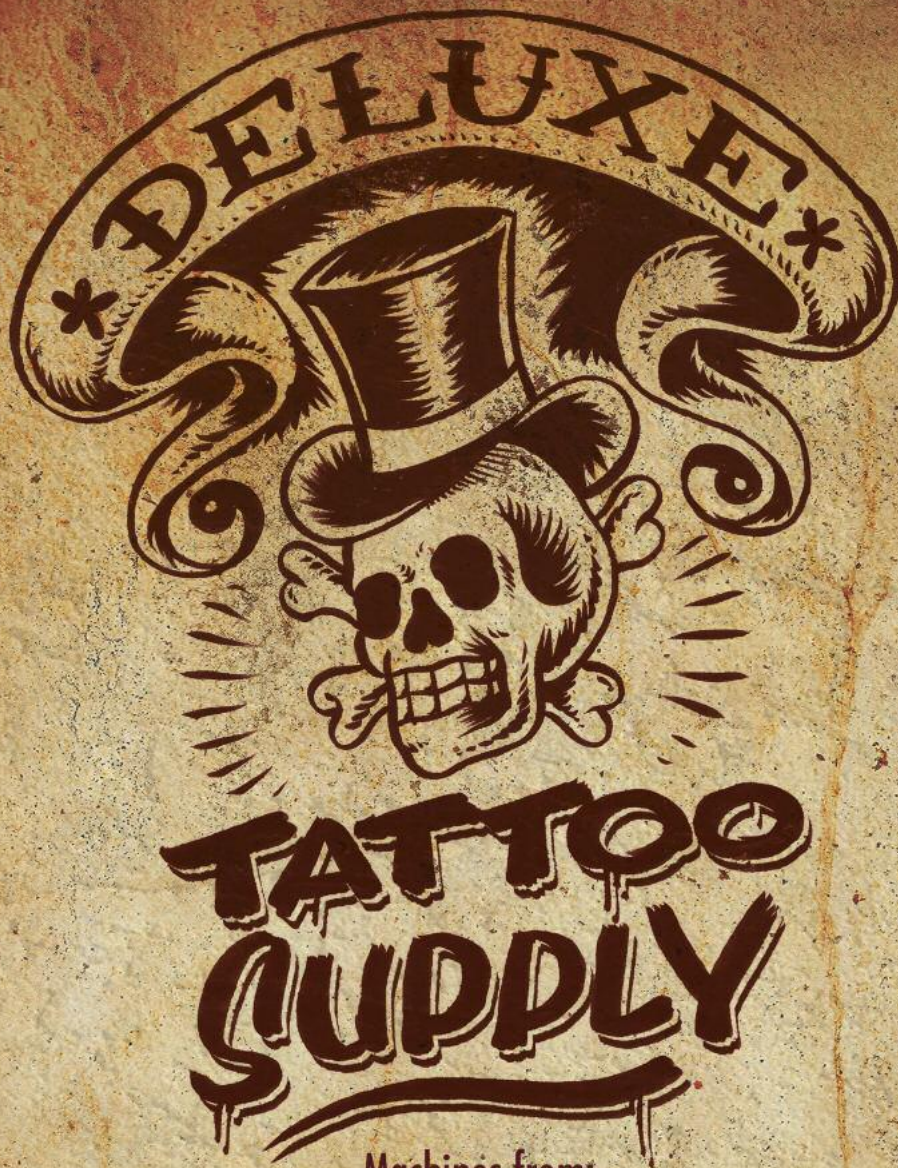
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Photo by Jenna Kraczk

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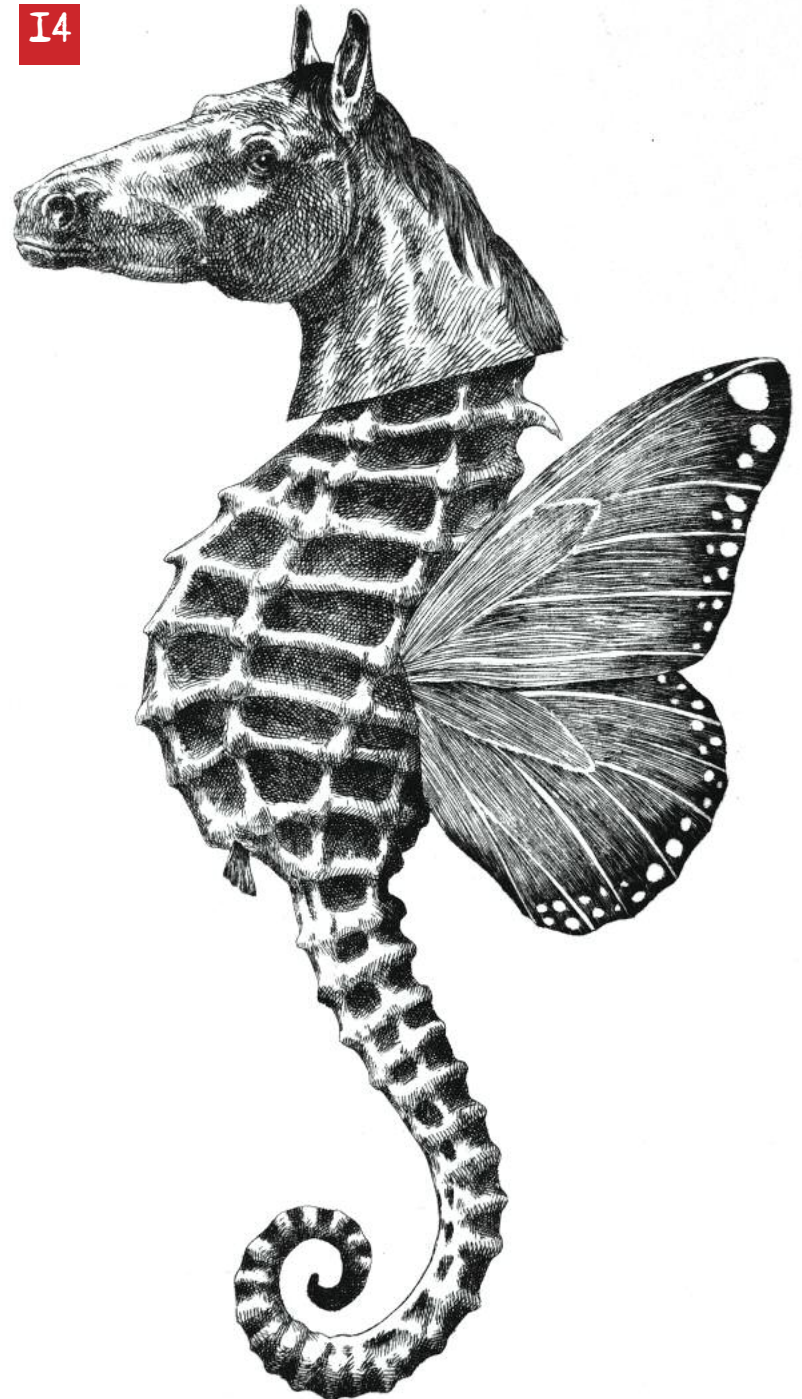
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WELCOME to 151

I'm fully aware that I'm about to open a can of worms with this editorial, but here in the Total Tattoo office we started debating the tricky subject of 'tattoo discrimination' following a recent post on social media...

The dictionary defines 'discrimination' as the prejudiced or unfair treatment of a group of people, usually on the grounds of characteristics over which they have no control (such as ethnicity, age, religion or sex). And it's wrong of course. But what about people with tattoos? You can certainly be discriminated against because you are tattooed. But if you've chosen to get that tattoo, are you really in a position to complain?

Although tattooing is now more mainstream than ever before, people with tattoos are still viewed by many as 'outsiders' – especially when it comes to attitudes in corporate workplaces and formal situations. I can't help but think that if a person wants to work in a conservative environment, then they really should consider the consequences before getting a visible tattoo. At the end of the day, it's your personal choice – but you should be prepared for any repercussions, and therefore shouldn't be surprised if you are turned down for a job or stared at because of this.

I can honestly say that I have never been 'discriminated' against because of my tattoos. Although I've had the odd stare from disapproving members of the public (probably more to do with my behaviour than my tattoos!), I have never been refused medical treatment, bullied, given inferior treatment to a non-tattooed person, or made to feel unwelcome in a formal environment. And that's the truth about discrimination. It's not the odd comment from strangers or being told that your neck tattoos are unsuitable for a managerial role in a bank; it's the constant prejudice that a minority faces, day in day out, because of who they are.

As a person who has always worked to promote tattooing, I see my responsibilities very much as a representative of the world in which I work. Most of the time I try to conduct myself in a positive manner – which I hope will help to change the minds of people who are quick to judge – but in all honesty, I would normally conduct myself in a positive manner whether I was tattooed or not, as that is how I was bought up!

In my experience I have often found that a lot of my tattooed friends tend to be happy to be part of an 'alternative' group (for some of us, it's the reason we got tattooed in the first place) so moaning that the world is against us seems almost hypocritical. At the end of the day, tattooed or not, people will judge you. But judging really isn't the same as prejudice, and if you've never experienced the latter, then you should count yourself lucky.



Perry

Total Tattoo Editorial Team
editor@totaltattoo.co.uk

“Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts”

E.B. White

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BOOK REVIEW

Tati

By Tati Compton

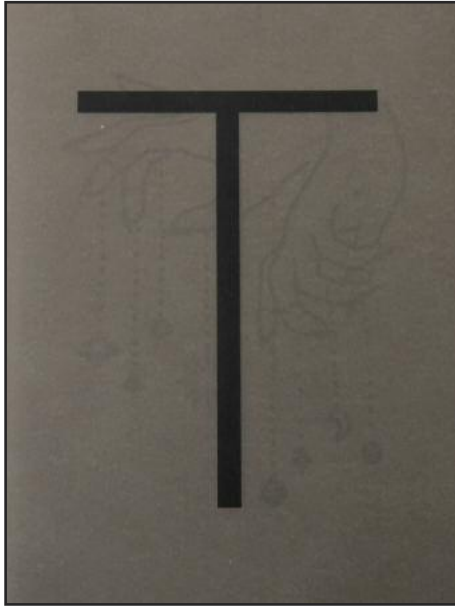
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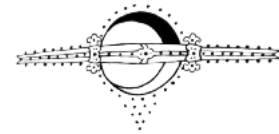
ISBN: 978-0-9935475-2-2

Available from

www.sangbleu.club/product/tati-compton/



This hardback book debuts the work of Tati Compton, a Los Angeles based tattooer who is renowned for her stick and poke technique. The book compiles photographs of her tattoos, psychedelic illustrations and over 800 tattoo designs. It's beautifully put together, and is a must for any fan of hand-poked and naïve tattooing.



RACIST INK COVERED UP

We've read in the news about a US tattoo studio that is offering to cover up racist and gang-related ink free of charge. Tattooist Dave Cutlip, of Southside Tattoo, Maryland, is calling it his "Random Acts of Tattoo" project. He got the idea after a man came into the studio hoping to get an offensive tattoo removed from his face. Dave said he could see the emotional hurt in the man's eyes; he realised there were a lot of other people in the same position and wanted to be able to do something make a difference. Posting the idea of free-of-charge no-questions-asked cover-ups on Facebook led to a crowdfunding campaign – and Dave is generously directing the proceeds to tattoo studios elsewhere who can't afford to do cover-ups or laser removal for free so that they can offer the same kind of service to clients in need.



**RICHARDS
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Richards Tattoo Studio in Aberdeen are looking for some new enthusiastic tattoo artists to join the existing hardworking team. There is space for full-time artists and guest artists. (Guest artists must have their own clients to work on.) They want consistent high standards of work, and no dramas or rockstar attitudes. Email info@richardstattoostudio.com with the subject line OPENING.

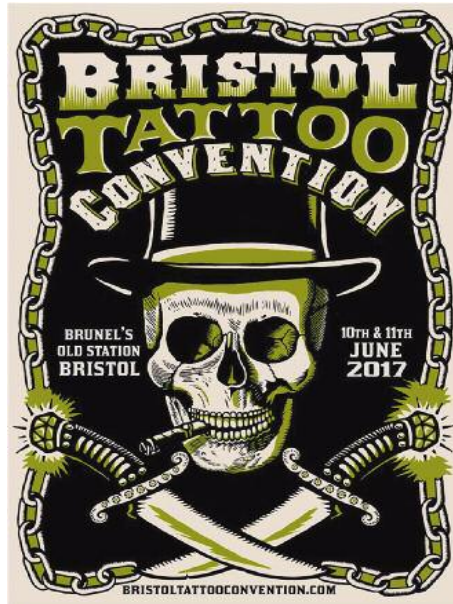
WIN TICKETS TO BRISTOL TATTOO CONVENTION

The Bristol Tattoo Convention returns for its third year at Brunel's Old Station on 10th and 11th June. We have been given a pair of weekend passes, for two lucky readers, courtesy of organiser Fil from Broad Street Tattoo. To be in with a chance of winning, simply email us the answer to the following question:

Which tattoo studio is organising the Bristol Tattoo Convention?

- A) Broad Street
- B) Broad Bean
- C) Jim Broadbent

Please email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with the subject heading BRISTOL, to reach us no later than 30th April. Usual terms and conditions apply (see p5). Good luck!



SHE PERSISTED

A phrase reportedly uttered by US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has become a tattoo trend. Earlier this year McConnell attempted to silence his colleague Elizabeth Warren as she gave a speech. According to news reports, he warned her that she would be removed, but “nevertheless, she persisted”. A Facebook comment – pointing out that rather than being an insult, that phrase was actually a compliment – inspired a group of friends to get identical “She Persisted” tattoos for themselves (at the same time making donations to Women Winning, a US organisation that supports the election of pro-choice women of all political persuasions). Apparently thousands of women are now adopting the phrase and getting it tattooed to symbolise standing up to anyone who is trying to silence them.



A FRESH START



Our news radar has picked up a story about a New York doctor who has set up a service for ex-prisoners, ex-gangsters and those who have been marked with tattoos against their will in situations such as human trafficking – matching them with tattoo studios who can remove the unwanted ink that is such a damaging reminder of their previous lives. David Ores, who used to offer laser tattoo removal at his surgery, decided to set up the Fresh Start initiative knowing there would be a huge demand, and knowing that many clients simply could not afford to pay for the work that would improve their lives so much. Potential clients send in a photo of their tattoo(s) together with a description of why they want it removed. They are then put in contact with a studio near where they live that is willing to do the work on a non-profit basis. Studios in the US, Canada, Germany and the UK have joined the scheme and we hear there are currently more than two thousand people on the waiting list.

Grizzlys Art

Grizzlys Art Collective are looking for a tattoo artist with at least 3 years' experience to join their busy studio. Please note: this is NOT an opportunity for an apprenticeship. Email grizzlystattoos@hotmail.com and include a link to your portfolio.

BOOK REVIEW

Geometry is dead! (The Self-Portraits of Xed Le Head) By Xed Le Head

£100.00

Limited to 100 copies

This book features 444 images of digital art that Xed created between 2012 and 2016, since (in his words) his “cruel removal from active tattooing” through serious illness and injury. Xed himself describes the book as follows: “A monotonous stream of skulls... Using the skull as both mirror and metaphor, the artist has attempted to pull the viewer into his world, if only for a few minutes... The ever-present image of the skull grows first tedious, then boring, through to becoming even oppressive... When the viewer has had enough of not even 100 of the 444 skulls proffered – it is at that point you close the book to put it away, right at that point that the artist wishes the viewer to know that the artist himself has no way of closing the book, of walking away from the discomfort, the confinement and the intense frustration.” However, the designs in this book are anything but monotonous. Xed beautifully combines geometry with bold, bright colours, resulting in a psychedelic effect as you turn the pages. He really has poured heart and soul into this project. There are only 100 copies available, all with handwritten front covers and inserts, and you can buy it from Xed himself at conventions and guest spots (check instagram, [@xedlehead](#) for his whereabouts) or from [www.xedlehead.com](#)



WIN NORTHAMPTON TICKETS

Northampton's International Tattoo Convention is back again, at Northampton Saints Rugby Ground, on 10th and 11th June. We have been given a pair of weekend tickets to give away, courtesy of organisers Nigel and Sue from Suns and Roses Tattoo. To be in with a chance of winning, simply email us the answer to the following question:

Which Northampton tattoo studio organises the convention?

- A) Suns and Roses
- B) Suns and Daughters
- C) Suns of Anarchy

Please email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with the subject heading NORTHAMPTON, to reach us no later than 30th April. Usual terms and conditions apply (see p5). Good luck!

BNTS NEW WEBSITE

The Total Tattoo Big North Tattoo Show website is now live at www.bignorthtattooshow.co.uk where you will find a list of the artists working the show and a link to buy tickets priced at just £12 for a day and £21 for the weekend.



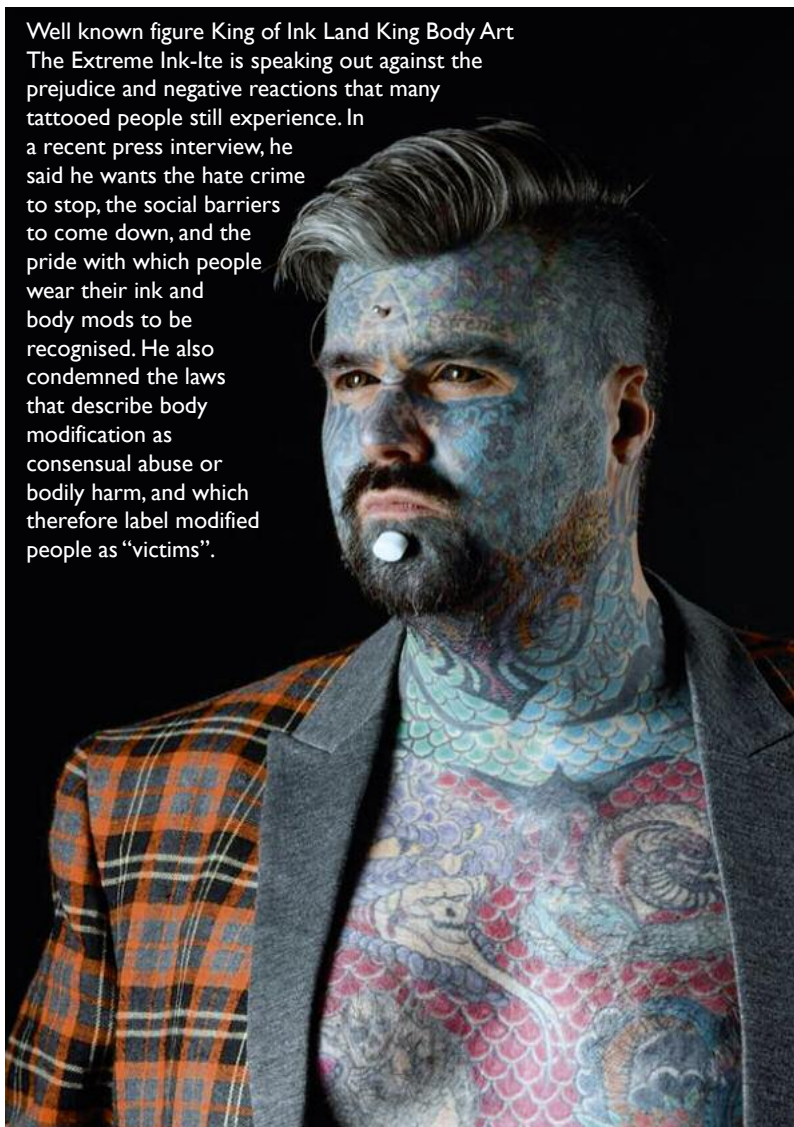
TOTAL TATTOO AND THE BIG NORTH TATTOO SHOW ARE NOW ON INSTAGRAM

We'll be posting updates of who is working plus competitions to win tickets and prizes

Follow us on [@totaltattoo](#) and [@bignorthtattooshow](#)

INSIDE WE'RE ALL THE SAME

Well known figure King of Ink Land King Body Art The Extreme Ink-Ite is speaking out against the prejudice and negative reactions that many tattooed people still experience. In a recent press interview, he said he wants the hate crime to stop, the social barriers to come down, and the pride with which people wear their ink and body mods to be recognised. He also condemned the laws that describe body modification as consensual abuse or bodily harm, and which therefore label modified people as "victims".



YOU'RE NOT OVARYACTING

"You're not ovaryacting" is the message the Robin Cancer Trust is sending out for Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, using tattoo designs to educate women about the symptoms of the disease. The charity has teamed up with Julie Clarke and Alex Bach of Flaming Gun Tattoo Studio (in Colchester) who have created some stunning tattoo imagery for the campaign. It's a project that's particularly close to Julie's heart, as she has just celebrated two years' clear after her own cancer surgery. Within days of the social media campaign going live, one of Flaming Gun's customers decided to go to her doctor – prompted by what she'd seen in the video – which Julie said made the whole thing worthwhile. Check out therobincancertrust.org and view the video on their YouTube channel. You can also see the designs on Flaming Gun's website, flamingguntattooostudio.blogspot.co.uk



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Jennings
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OTTO

Interview by Lizzy and Perry
Pictures by Otto



Otto D'Ambra's White Elephant Gallery is in super cool Hackney in East London. The studio is awash with creativity, and Otto enjoys working in different artistic media with equal passion – whether he's putting ink into skin with his tattoos or ink onto paper with his printmaking.

Otto, you were one of the pioneers of the surrealist, black, linear tattoo. Was this what led you into printmaking?

In a way, yes. When I first started tattooing in this style, a friend told me, 'You have to go deeper to make it look better'. I took his advice. For me, going deeper meant going back to the source, and that was what initially led me to study printmaking. Now I do both. I love tattooing and I love printmaking, and I don't think I'd want to stop doing either of them. If I'm tattooing for too long I miss printmaking, and vice versa. I started exhibiting in galleries about six years ago. Someone in a local gallery saw one of my client's tattoos and asked who did them. They got in touch with me, I sent them some sketches, and they said they would be interested in showing my work. After that first show, other galleries became interested too. This year I hope to have solo exhibitions in Brussels and Milan.

What is your artistic background?

I studied fine art in Italy and got a degree in set design. First I was building and painting sets for children's shows, then I worked as a set designer for catwalk events. But I got bored with it because it felt too mechanical. It was interesting, but I wasn't being as creative as I wanted to be. I began tattooing on the side – I just love the way tattoos look on the body – but at that point I never imagined it would turn into my full-time job. I've been tattooing for twelve years now.

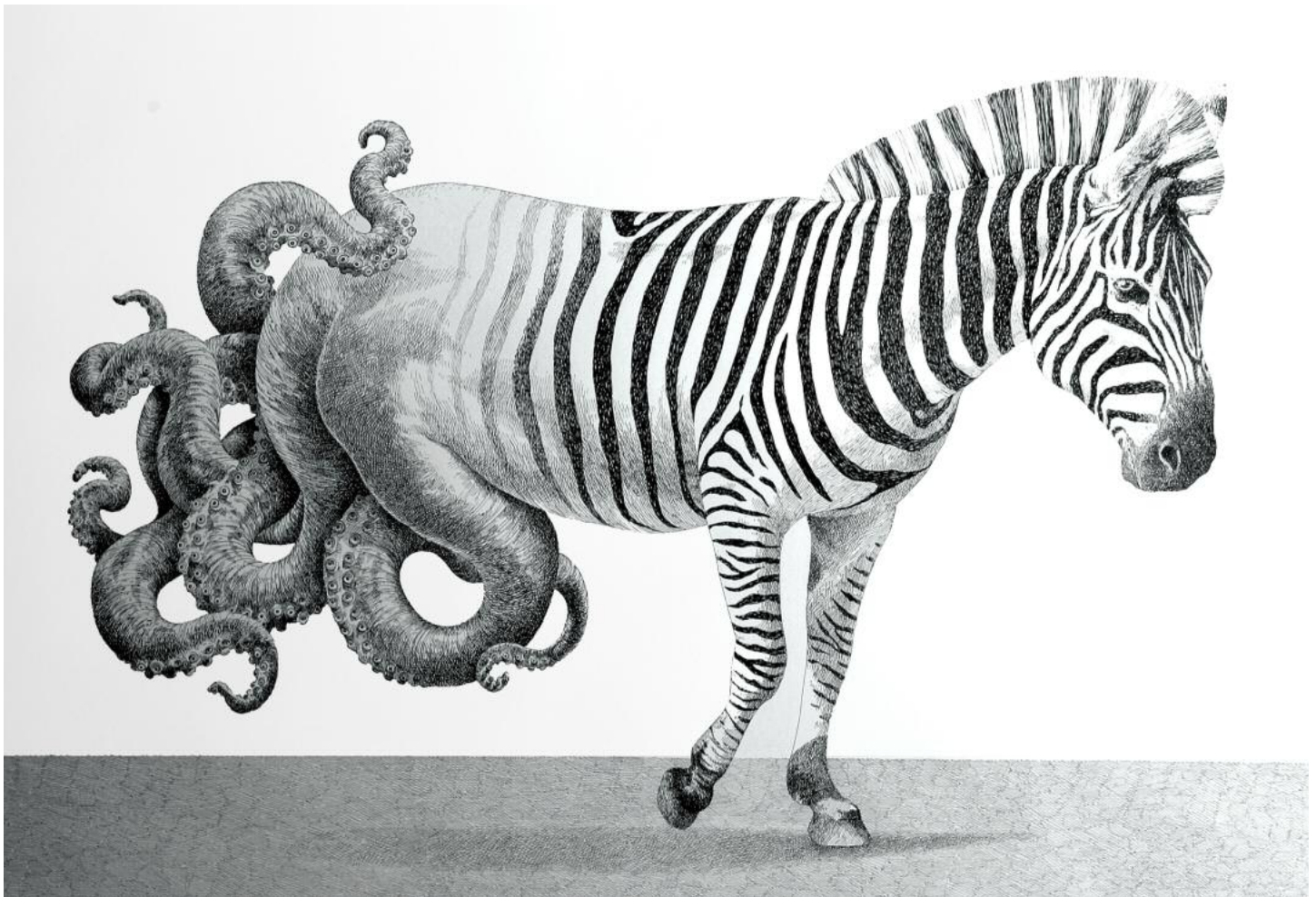


Who taught you to tattoo?

When I first started, I went round the shops in Milan asking for an apprenticeship. Some of them treated me like shit, but I found one really nice guy who let me watch him tattoo and was happy to answer all my questions. That was really good, because he asked for nothing in return. I did it for six months then I bought my equipment. For the first year, I tattooed friends for free. I was doing a mix of everything – standard traditional-style tattooing to begin with, then progressing to colourful, surreal stuff. I still believe that learning the technical side helps you in the long run because it gives you the tools and the knowledge to develop your own style. I see a lot of tattooists who want to get straight to it and think they can be artists before they learn how to tattoo. They want to do their own thing before they learn the fundamentals. But if you don't know how to shade, pack colour, etc, it will close your mind and you will never be able to think properly about developing your own creativity.

You moved from colour to monochrome...

Yes. Because I was used to drawing with a pen, all my sketches were just lines. I would put tracing paper on top of the sketch in the usual way to refine the drawing, but one day I suddenly thought, 'why not treat the sketch as the finished design?' So I tried it, and it was fun. I found it really easy and much less stressful to work that way, because line drawing and cross-hatching came so naturally to me. People became interested in my style very quickly, especially here in England. I think that's because so many people love Victorian etchings and engravings, and my work has a similar feel. In fact to begin with, when I was still learning the style, I was actually reproducing Victorian illustrations. But I stopped doing that because I didn't want to just copy; I wanted to make my own art.



Do you feel constrained when you are creating a tattoo for a client rather than producing your own art from your own ideas?

Sometimes it's a little harder, but there isn't really much difference. I'm really lucky because all my customers are very flexible; they come to me with the concept they'd like me to represent, and they let me do whatever I want with it. When I'm making my own art from my own ideas, there are still rules that I have to follow – and it can sometimes take me a very long time to work out how I'm going to represent a particular subject or emotion. If I'm creating a tattoo, I will talk to my client about the best ways to execute the design; if I'm working on a picture, I talk to myself!

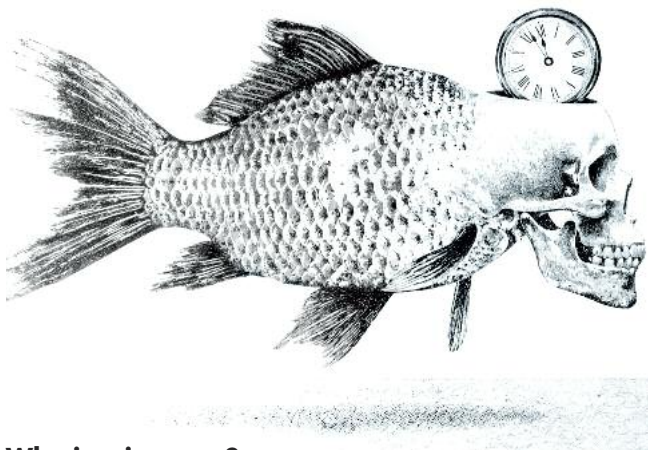
Is there more pressure when you're working with a client?

There's definitely more pressure when you're working on someone's skin. If I need time to think about the design, I can't really leave the tattoo and come back to it – whereas I can easily do that with my own artwork. With a tattoo, I have to be more sure about what I'm doing. I can be more 'free' and take more risks with my pictures – then if something works well, I can use that idea in a tattoo. That's the great thing about working with two media; each of them inspires the other.



Your innovative juxtaposed imagery has become a real tattoo trend. How do you feel about that?

I don't know! I only found out I was doing something innovative when I was chatting with Travellin' Mick at a convention and he told me I was one of the first to do surreal linework tattoos. I was shocked! I didn't realise! But then I don't really look at what else is happening within tattooing. I don't know if other people were doing it before me. I don't feel upset by the fact that lots of other people are now creating tattoos in this style, as long as they don't directly copy me or try to mimic exactly what I do. I think it's fine to take inspiration from other artists – I certainly do, but I try not to do anything too close to what they're already doing.



Who inspires you?

I tend to find my inspiration in the work of artists in other media. When I was learning tattooing, I realised it was really difficult to find your own way by looking solely at tattooists; it's like if you were a sculptor and you only looked at sculpture. If you regard tattooing as another form of art, then you can look at everything else that's around: photography, painting, etc. I originally got a lot of inspiration from Dali. He used to be one of my favourite artists, but I'm not so fond of him now. When I started to read more about him, I realised he was quite commercial in his approach; technically he was amazing, but I think his art was more about showing off...

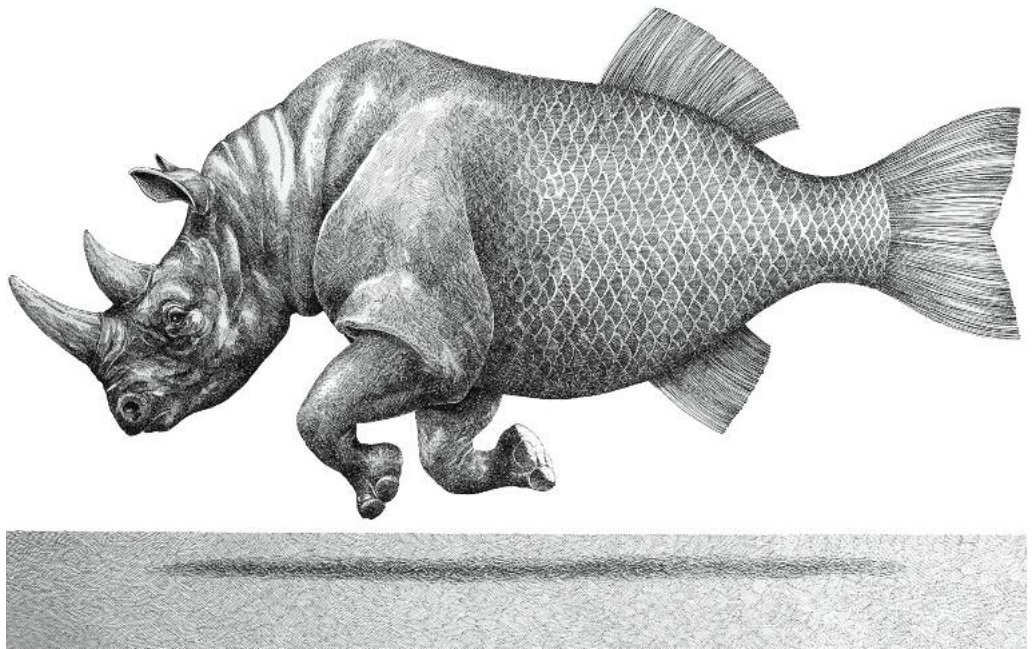




What machines do you use?

I started with coil. The first machine I bought was a Micky Sharpz Hybrid. It was an amazing machine, so I bought two more. (I like to keep spares, just in case!) I've changed machines many times. I've got about twenty. I like to spend time getting to understand a machine and how it works. If you know about your tools, you know how to work with them and how to fix them if something goes wrong. A while back, I was working with a tattooist who was guesting in Milan and he'd forgotten his machines. He borrowed a shader, but still did amazing, clean lines. He said to me all you have to do is arrange your hands around the machine you have. As long as it's something you can manage, you can do it. That made me think, and it led me to looking at machines more, changing springs, etc. I've just bought a rotary to do dotwork, and the other day I used it for lining; and it was just a matter of adjusting the pressure and a few other things to make it work really really well. I normally use three or four in a tattoo. I suppose the benefit is that if you keep changing machines, you keep having to adjust your hands, and you develop an even greater understanding of what you're doing. It's like when you're driving a car that you're comfortable with, then you change to another car and it takes a little while to adjust.





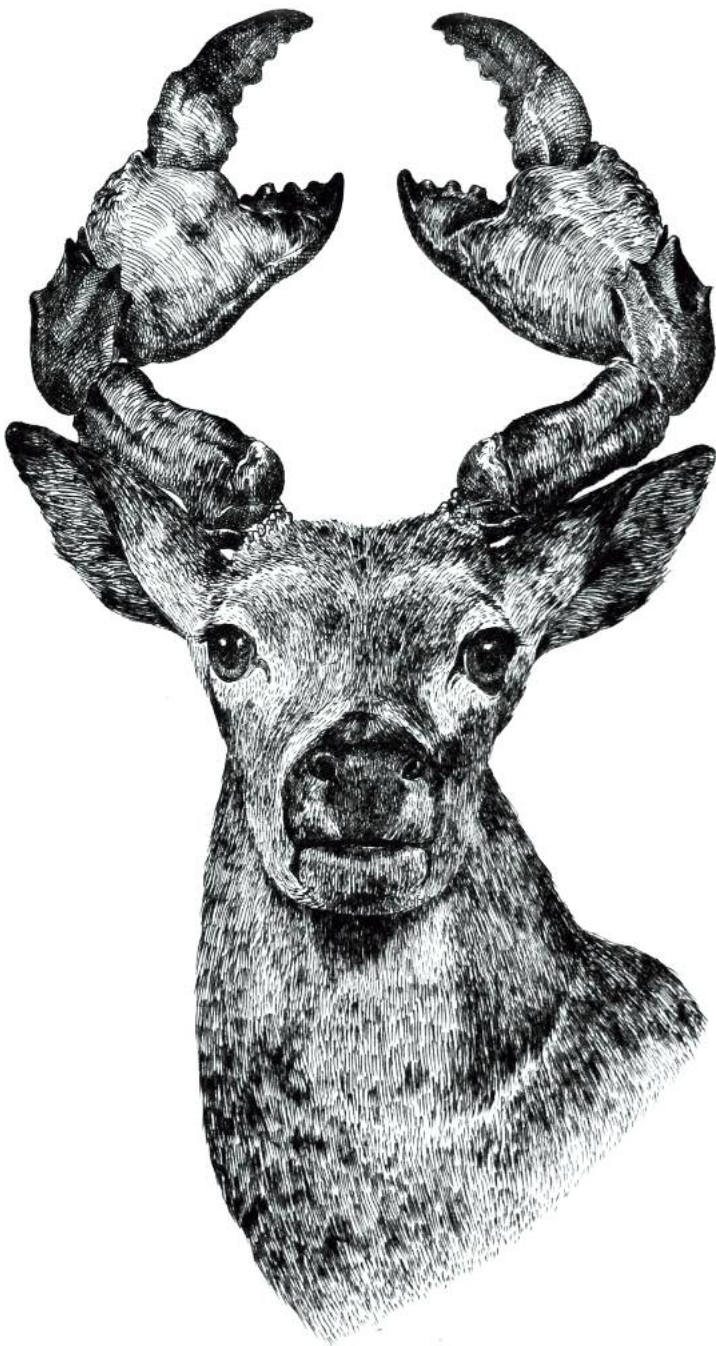
Do you use any technology when designing your prints or tattoos?

About a year ago I started to work digitally. Some people say you shouldn't use a computer when designing tattoos, but why not? It's just another tool. But I think the danger is once you put yourself in front of a screen it can kill your creativity. I've certainly found that. So I prefer doing a sketch on paper, then using my laptop to work on it if needed. I've also started to experiment with photocopiers, stencil machines and collage. The idea came from printmaking; you have a surface to work on, and you can do whatever you want as long as it's printable at the end. It's fun, because I can use these different tools to open my mind.

How do you decide on the size of your tattoos?

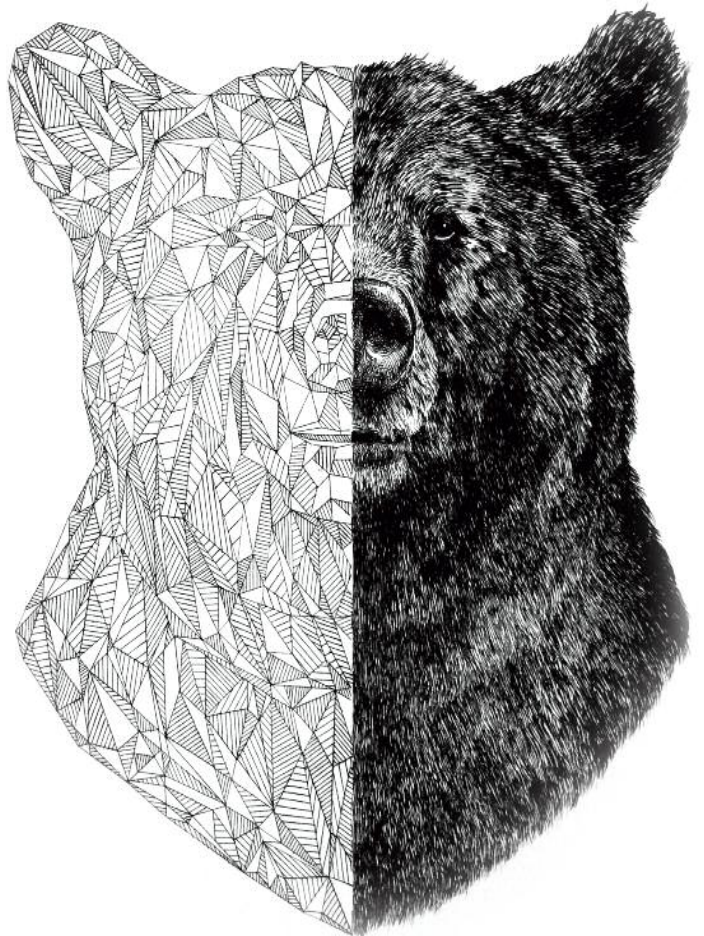
I do medium-large pieces. I don't do many small tattoos because there's a lot of detail in my work and I don't think they would age as well if they were small. I always try to go bigger. I learned that from experience. When I first started doing line work, I would keep the lines fairly spaced out because I wasn't sure how well they'd age. But I've since learned that I can put them quite close, because even when the ink spreads and the lines come together the design doesn't get lost. The effect can even enhance the tattoo, especially when you've used the lines for shading.





Tell us how you work when you're tattooing.

I have one appointment a day when I'm tattooing, and I always book my appointments for 1pm so that I have the morning in the studio to draw or paint, reply to emails, and so on. I love being in my studio; I have everything here. I like to think about the upcoming appointment and have time to refresh my mind before I begin tattooing, and I take two or three hours to design the tattoo before the client arrives. I make a sketch, but this is just for me, to help me think about what I'm going to do. Sometimes I get a really cool idea at the last second! But there are days when things are a bit more stressful and it takes me a lot longer to feel happy with what I'm doing. Clients feel this too. There's a connection. You need to be excited by what you're doing. Some clients are a bit apprehensive when I say I'm not going to show them the design in advance, but most of them love that - because they know it's going to be bespoke. They know it's going to be something that flows with their body and works with their shape. Occasionally I look at the finished tattoo and think, 'I have to add something...!' So I start tattooing again! People love that, because they can see that I really care about the design and want to do something very cool. It's not just a case of 'I did it, you're happy, that's it.' And I don't do it just to show off!



Do you think tattooing is now a fully evolved artform?

Tattooing is changing in the same way as fine art has changed. Fine art moved on from traditional painting to crazy things like sharks in boxes; and tattooing is doing the same, but it's taking longer. When I first started exhibiting in galleries, they would say to me, 'We're not going to mention you're a tattooist, because people won't like it'. But now they always want to mention it. Another thing that's changing is the increasing collaboration between tattooists and product designers - Xoil doing watch straps and working with Renault cars, for instance. So yes, more and more people are recognising tattooing as a form of art. The crazy thing is that while people are happy to pay thousands of pounds for a tattoo, they won't spend a couple of hundred pounds on an artist's original print. People understand that tattoos are expensive and if you want a good tattoo you need to be willing to pay for it, but in that respect fine art is still very misunderstood.

Finally, what are your ambitions and future plans?

I want to stay in London, unless they kick me out with Brexit! [Laughs] And now that I'm a father, I want to make sure I spend as much time as possible with my son. But generally, I just want to carry on doing what I'm doing, because it makes me happy.

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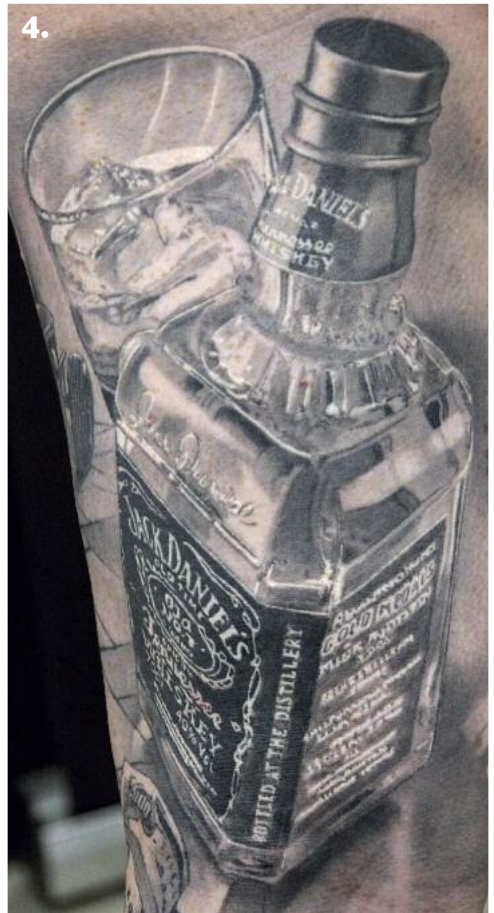
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MILAN TATTOO CONVENTION

After more than two decades, the Milan Tattoo Convention has been very successfully rebooted. No longer is it held in a outmoded venue that's bursting uncomfortably at the seams. It's now in a spacious convention centre and playing host to more top quality artists than ever before.

The Fiera di Milano, a sprawling convention centre conveniently located not too far from the historic centre of the city, is perfectly suited to the task. It's not exactly cosy, but visitors and artists alike appreciated the fact that there was room to move and room to work. And the relaunch of the convention seemed to attract a whole new bunch of younger and extremely ambitious artists. Milan is now well and truly up where it belongs, and everyone enjoyed gathering there after the winter break.

The meeting point at the convention was the Killer Kiccen Art Space, a perfect mix of gallery and bar area where you could groove to top DJs, lounge on vintage chairs, chat with fellow fans and artists, or simply enjoy the art on the big screen. This proved to be the perfect antidote to the more hard-edged atmosphere pervading the tattoo competitions this year. It's a trend that seems to be spreading from south east Asia, where winning an award at a convention has long been seen as a passport to success and a crucial stepping stone in a tattooist's career (in contrast to the West, where tattoo competitions at conventions are often regarded more as entertainment for the audience). Increasing numbers of artists from China, Taiwan, Korea and other south east Asian countries are attending conventions in the West and bringing their serious competitive approach with them. And there were many artists at Milan who were very obviously going all-out to prepare their most spectacular work for presentation on the stage.



1, 2 & 4. by miguel bohigues, v tattoo (spain)
3. neon judas at work

Julian Siebert (Corpsepainter, Germany), for instance, spent eighteen hours, across just two days, on a huge black-and-grey underwater psychedelic fantasy scene. His client had already received a full backpiece at his studio a few months earlier, over the course of just three days, so they both knew he could take the inevitable pain and discomfort. In the next aisle, British newcomer Ryan Smith paired up with Jay Freestyle (who is based in The Netherlands but travels extensively) to design and tattoo a unique leg composition uniting elegant lacework and filigree ornamentation with colour portraiture, mandalas, Ryan's trademark jewels, and a bunch of watercolour flowers. They took the entire three days of the convention to execute this finely detailed piece on one brave lady – and boy, was it worth the effort. They received the trophy for Best of Show on the Sunday night, with judge Randy Engelhard commenting that he had “never seen a tattoo that united so many styles with such perfection”.

So Milan is definitely back. And it's bigger and better than ever. Maybe you'll be tempted to plan a trip to the 2018 show?





9.



12.

5. by miguel bohigues,
v tattoo (spain)
6. by omar santos,
santos tattoo (italy)
7-9. julian siebert,
corpsepainter (germany)
10. by tibi, tempel (germany)
11-13. tebori
by slava starkov (russia)



10.



11.



13.



14. by john maxx,
radical ink (romania)
15. collaboration by ryan smith
and jay freestyle
16. by jay freestyle,
dermadonna (holland)
17. by horitoshi I (japan)

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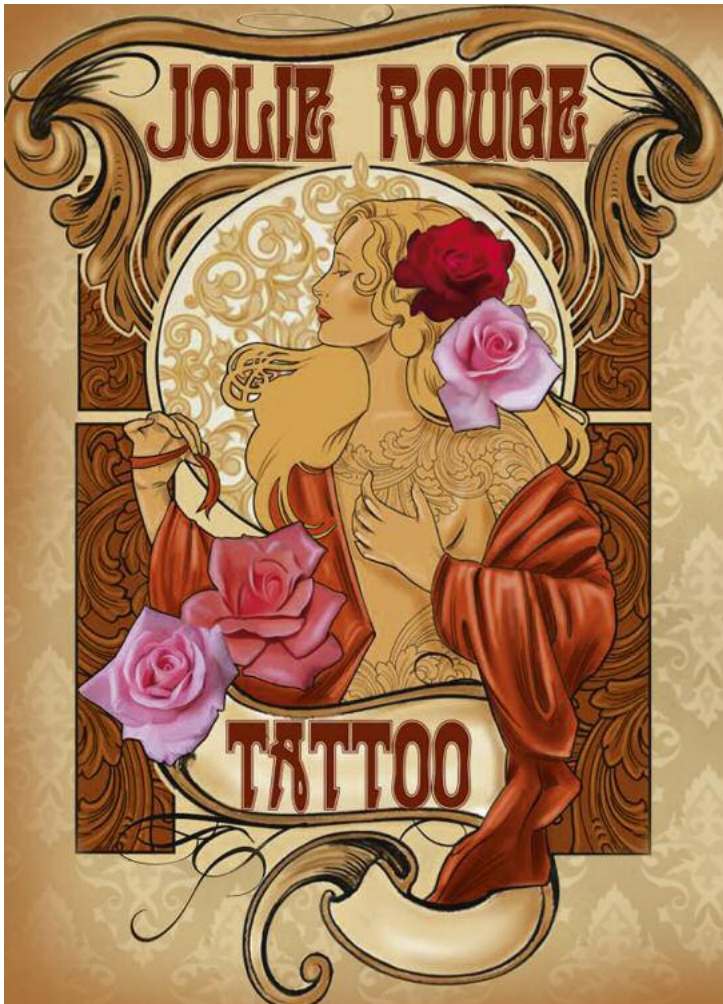




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Slave to the Needle 20

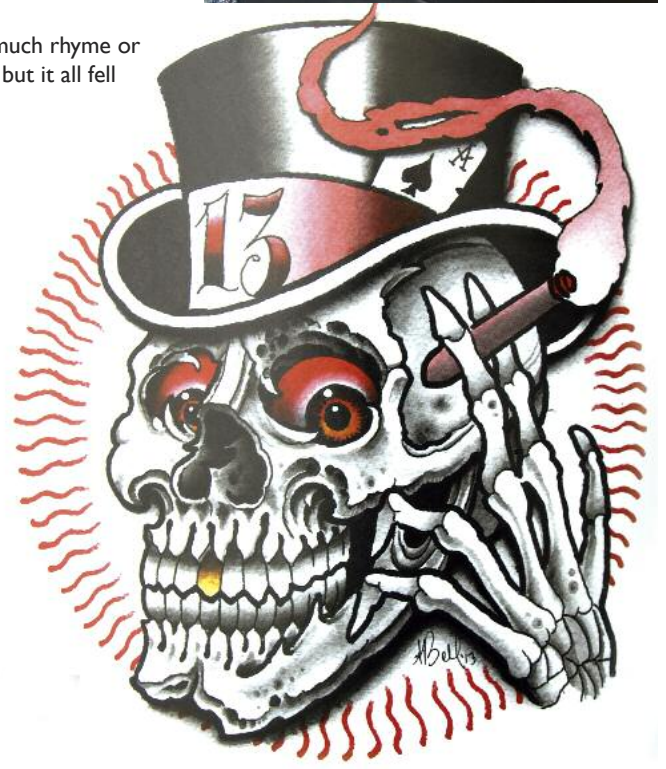
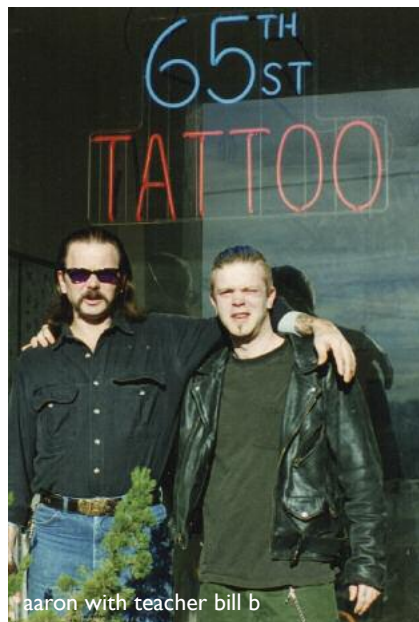
Aaron Bell's internationally famous studio, Slave to the Needle in Seattle, USA recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. To mark this momentous occasion Aaron held an exhibition of works by some of the artists who have worked and guested at the studio, and published a beautiful, inspirational book that celebrates and looks back over Slave to the Needle's history. We caught up with Aaron recently to find out more.

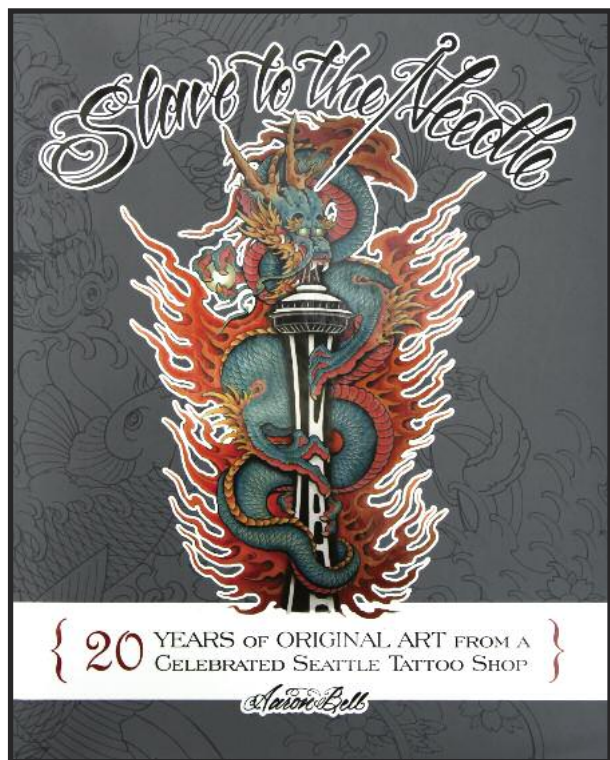
Why did you decide to publish this book?

There's such a large body of great working cycling through the shop on a regular basis, and the years seem to be rolling by so fast, that I thought it would be a great idea to take a snapshot of it.

The book is divided into a biography, reference book and exhibition catalogue. Was this something you'd always set out to do?

Actually no. Deciding to make this book was pretty impulsive, and there wasn't much rhyme or reason to the structure either. The narrative was just a stream of consciousness, but it all fell together in a pretty cohesive way. (At least I hope so. Ha ha!)



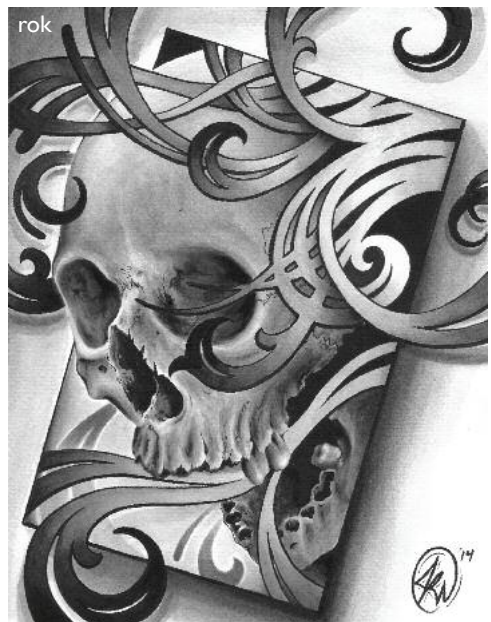


What did you want to achieve with the book?

Tattooing is constantly changing by leaps and bounds. Reflecting back to the 90s, it seemed like what we did then was pretty different from a lot of what we're seeing now. So I'm hoping that this book will reflect all that change. Of course, it will take a little time to tell if it really stands out as something different.

How long did the project take, from idea to finished book?

It took me about a year and a half. Initially I planned on self-publishing; I found some attractive, cheap desktop publishing software online, downloaded it, and did the entire layout myself. Once completed though, I decided to run it by Schiffer Publishing for the hell of it, and they seemed quite keen on releasing it. However, they had to rebuild the entire project since the software I'd used was incompatible with theirs. Unfortunately this created a bunch of new work. So I must say I'm delighted to be done with it.



Could you tell us a little bit about the process behind publishing the book through Schiffer?

Yes, I had a couple of phone conversations with Pete Schiffer himself. He was pleasant to deal with and I found him very accommodating. That said, once things got rolling I definitely butted heads with them a few times. They sent me a daunting book-building guide, and they have set policies on how to provide and label all of the material. As I mentioned, my case was a bit unique since I'd already built the book myself, so a lot of that stuff I was unwilling to do. I completely understand why they have those policies, but from my standpoint it just looked like more work. Having spent the past year and a half on the project, I was done! Fortunately they finally gave in and were able to work from the layout I'd provided.

The sheer amount of information you've got in the book is astounding. Was it difficult to know when to stop writing and collecting images?

Part of me would have liked to keep going. There are always more and better visuals to pull from the old psyche; as far as writing goes, towards the end of the book I had some pretty major transformational experiences, but I guess that will provide fodder for a future project.

Over twenty years, both you and Slave to the Needle have been through and achieved a lot. How easy was it to remember the detailed history of the studio?

It was a struggle at first, but once the tap was on, shit just flowed. The real challenge lay in editing a lot of stuff out. There were some pretty dramatic things that happened over the years which I ultimately decided were best left out. These were incidents involving other people that, even though they'd make an amazing stories, didn't necessarily reflect well on them, so it seemed unfair to write about it. A lot of tattoo tales are best left for the bars.

levi polzin



aaron bell



Over 20 years you must have amassed a huge collection of artwork and photographs. How did you decide what to include?

Yeah for sure, one definitely acquires a lot of pics in 20 years. Since we didn't use to carry cameras, I didn't have as much older material as I would have liked, but fortunately I did have prints from back then which I was able to scan. Frustratingly, there were some I couldn't find, like drinking in the bar with little Tatu from the classic 70s TV series Fantasy Island. Revisiting old works and memories – you talk about losing your friends, as well as your Mom.



damon albarn from blur getting tattooed by aaron

fitz



Were some memories difficult to revisit?

Yes, it was somewhat difficult. There were some things that were too painful to write about. However, I found that revisiting all that stuff was pretty beneficial. Being forced to reflect on those times reminded me how much pain I've endured. It enabled me to cut myself some slack, and to recognise and appreciate the inner strength that I've been able to cultivate as a result.

How do you feel when you look back, in print, at what you've achieved in twenty years?

I'm amazed! I'm very proud not only of my own accomplishments, but also the many accomplishments of all the amazing people who've contributed to the shop over the years. I've been blessed. I've been given so many opportunities by so many people in the business. It's dumbfounding. Like this interview right here for instance: it's easy to take it for granted, but what a great opportunity to plug my book. And this is only one of several opportunities you alone have given me, Perry. So thank you for that. I guess what I'm driving at here is the biggest take-away from writing the book is that it's helped me develop a profound sense of gratitude for the myriad people who've contributed to my success.

What do you feel is the significance of recording the history of the shop and its place in American tattooing?

As the saying goes, if we don't know where we came from, we don't know where we're going. I've always loved tattoo history. It's weird to think of my generation - the 'middle school' generation - actually becoming a part of it, but it is. On the inside I still feel like a kid who just got into this exciting trade, looking at all the great new artists on Instagram or learning a few new licks at the Paris or London convention, but on the outside I've got more wrinkles, tendonitis and a sore back!



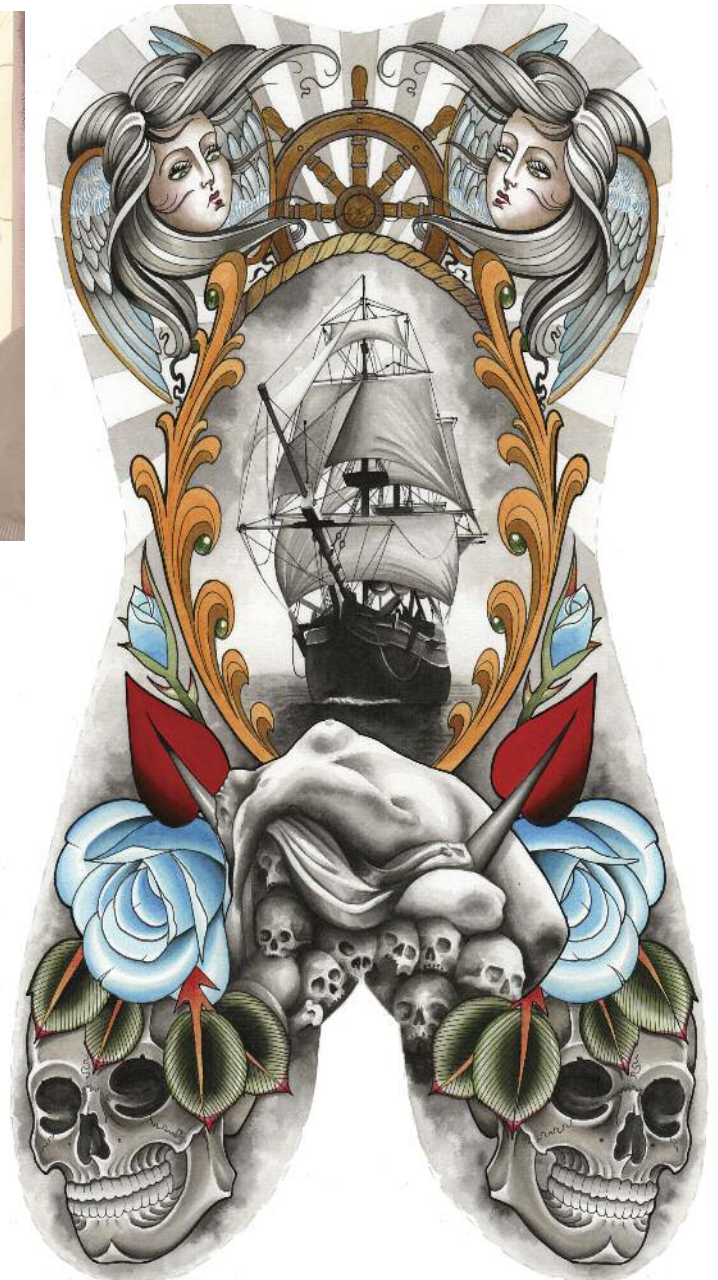
lindsey lawson



greg collingan



honest john



elijah cole



How did the reality of publishing the book match up to your expectations?

Although the finished book is very different from what I'd initially envisioned, the quality is good; there are over 500 images and, because I ended up going with Schiffer Publishing, the price point is far better than I'd expected. For these reasons the book will probably reach a much broader audience than I could have hoped.

In the book, you talk about flash sets and you express a regret that it's fallen by the wayside. Do you see this book as a way of providing reference for tattooers? Would you consider creating a STTN flash set?

Well, I hope it at least provides some inspiration. I'd certainly love to see an resurgence of flash. The shop collaborated on the flash sheet on the inside cover, which was fun. I could see us collaborating on a type of flash book in the future if there is a desire for it.

Did you come across any problems when curating the book and the exhibition?

Fortunately I had a lot of help from my wife Melissa and the rest of the crew, but any time you're dealing with tattoo artists and deadlines you'd better expect a little frustration. All things considered, things went pretty damn smooth.

How did you manage your time between creating the book, running a studio, painting and tattooing?

I didn't have a life for a year and a half! It was pretty overwhelming, but I'm very fortunate to have been able to take a few extra days off work here and there. I found myself actually hoping for some of my tattoo appointments to cancel during this time. Of course they didn't; it seemed like they'd wait for the days I was completely set up, fully prepared and really enthusiastic, to cancel. Ha ha!

kiwi matt



manuel valenzuela



low School Hannya t-shirt design by Aaron Bell, 2002.



Oni by Aaron Bell, 2007.



Aaron Bell

December 2007.

With regards to the art show, did you encounter any difficulties with dealing with the artists?

Well, it was interesting trying to find middle ground here when it came to pricing. To buy some pieces, you'd have to consider taking out a mortgage, and others were practically being given away. But fortunately this turned out to be a non-issue because the gallery was really easy going. They genuinely seemed excited about the subject matter, and weren't hell bent on making cash hand over fist.

Did the artists create the pieces specifically for the exhibition and book?

Aside from the paintings in the fine art gallery, yes.

Why do you think tattoo books are important? For the history, the art or as reference wise?

We tattooers are only as good as our reference library. I have always loved tattoo reference books. Although I keep saying I'm going to downsize, I'm constantly expanding



my shelf space, as there's nothing more magical and inspiring than a good tattoo reference book. One of the exciting things about going to conventions is to see what my friends or artists I admire have published or printed throughout the year. Sure, you can find images these days on Google, but designs are low res, not in context, and staring at a damn computer all the time fucks with your eyes. It's so cool to get the story around the art, to read about the artists, and to flip through and touch the paper the image is printed on. I'm a very tactile person so maybe I'm a little biased.

Where can people buy the book, and how much does it cost?

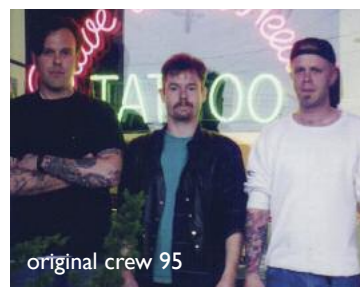
The price point is a mere \$29.99. Although I like to support independent booksellers whenever possible, it is also available at the large chains as well as on Amazon.

Is the book a limited edition?

I was originally going to produce a run of 500, but since going with Schiffer, the sky is the limit. I think this book has something for everyone, from tattooers to enthusiast alike.

Thank you again for the interview, Perry and thanks to everyone who has taken the time to read it. Your enthusiasm for this wonderful craft is what it's all about.

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original crew 95



kristjan olson



greg collingan



aaron bell

PULP SUICIDE

This month's cover model is Pulp, a Suicide Girl and alternative model with a passion for animals...

Tell me about yourself.

I'm Pulp. I'm a Suicide Girl and alternative model.

How did you get into modelling?

My mom used to model before I was born and encouraged me when she thought I was going to grow super tall (spoiler: I'm not). So I kind of fell into my niche when Suicide Girls reached out to me. Outside of them, I've been experimenting creatively and artistically.

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

My first tattoo was on my 18th birthday (because I'm an adult and you can't stop me, mom!) and it was a zodiac sign on my left shoulder. It was a Pisces and Leo sign smashed together and I thought I was way cool. I still have it, but it's sort of blended in with the flowers. I forget it's there so I don't think about it anymore.

Do you have a theme to your tattoos?

Most of my tattoos are film, video game, or book related. I just get what I love. I studied film and writing in college, and media just shaped me as a person. There's no deep meanings to them. My current favourite is my Hannibal Lecter-Dale Gribble on my left forearm. King of the Hill is one of my favourite shows and I love Silence of the Lambs.

What was your most painful tattoo?

My stomach, definitely. It's stark black shading and it took me two sessions to get through. I wouldn't recommend it!

Any plans for more ink?

Totally! My Frankenstein has been unfinished for too long. I want to finish my right arm with more feminine work to contrast my scary arm. I also have my left thigh planned and I'm working on designs for my back!

How would you describe your overall style?

I honestly just do whatever I feel fits me. It's kind of a mix of grunge with messy make-up and goth with darker tones. I don't wear make-up everyday, and I'll happily run around in leggings and a t-shirt. I'm all over the place.

Tell me about being a Suicide Girl.

Suicide Girls is a community of nude alternative pin-up models who embrace individual beauty and breaking away from society's expectations. The name comes from the phrase "committing social suicide". It's an awesome community of women where I've met some of my best friends and found a fun little place to talk about my goofy interests.

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

Protect yourself and your integrity. The industry is saturated and getting noticed does seem important, but your personal safety is the most important. I know so many girls who don't take adequate care in meeting new photographers and go to places alone and get hurt. Take someone with you. If anyone is making you uncomfortable, don't feel obliged to stay! And don't do anything you're not comfortable doing. You have the right to say no. Another bit of advice: Negativity does come with the job. Try to not let it affect you. Some people just want to make you feel bad about yourself so they can feel better. Ignore, block, and move on. Although that's easier said than done of course. But you're already better because you're putting yourself out there!

Are there any models that inspire you?

I'm lucky that all the models who inspire me are my friends. I look up to them when they're achieving their goals and doing awesome projects. They inspire me to work harder.

What are you most passionate about?

Animals. Dogs, specifically. I donate money and my time to help animal shelters and I'd love to rescue more older dogs. The dog I show off in all my social media is my old man dachshund I got from a backyard. He's seriously the best dog I've ever had.

What are your thoughts on contemporary tattoo culture?

I'm thrilled with tattoo culture becoming more inclusive. I've had jobs where I wasn't allowed to show any tattoos, so seeing how much more accepting businesses and society are becoming is wonderful.

Do you have any life goals or aspirations that you'd like to share?

I'm just letting life take me wherever it likes. I'm still trying to better my work, but I never know what my next step is. When I'm older, I don't want to regret not taking advantage of my experiences and connections.

What exciting things can we expect from you in the future?

I'm working on setting up a twitch stream. I have a lot of friends who currently stream and fans who have expressed an interest in me moving into that field. I think it would be a fun outlet to show people who I am as a person. I already have a channel set up. I just need to get going!

How do we get in touch with you?

Social media is always the best way. My Twitter and Instagram have the same handles, @pulpicide

Interview and pictures by Jenna Kraczek



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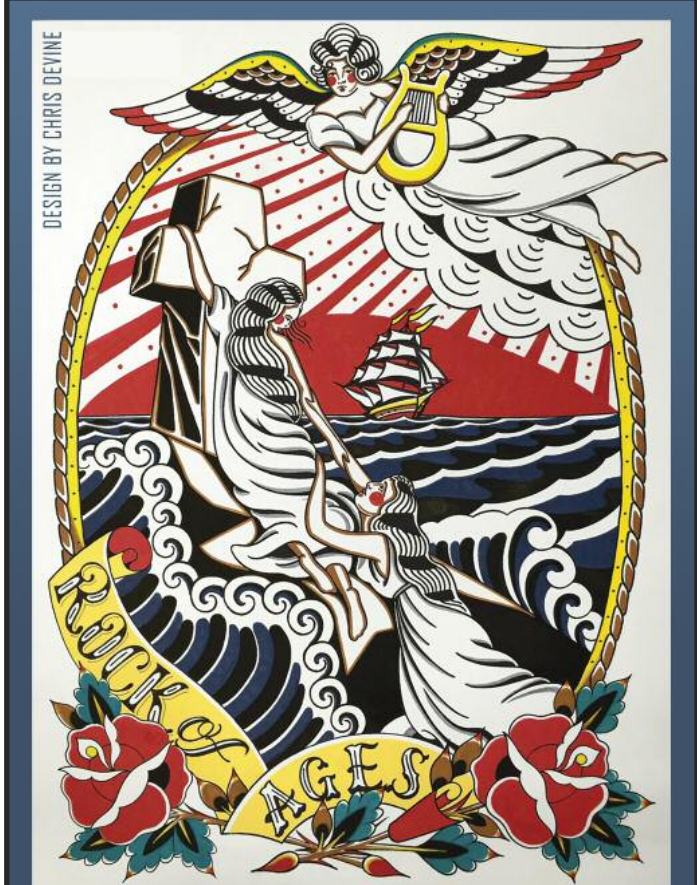
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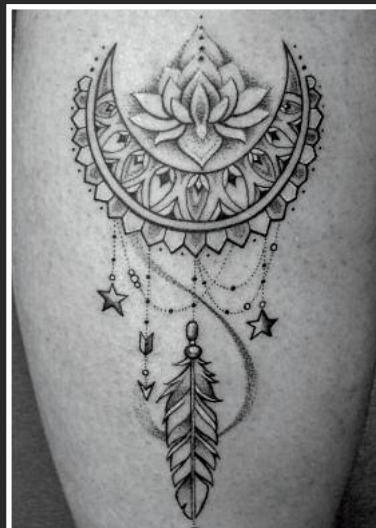
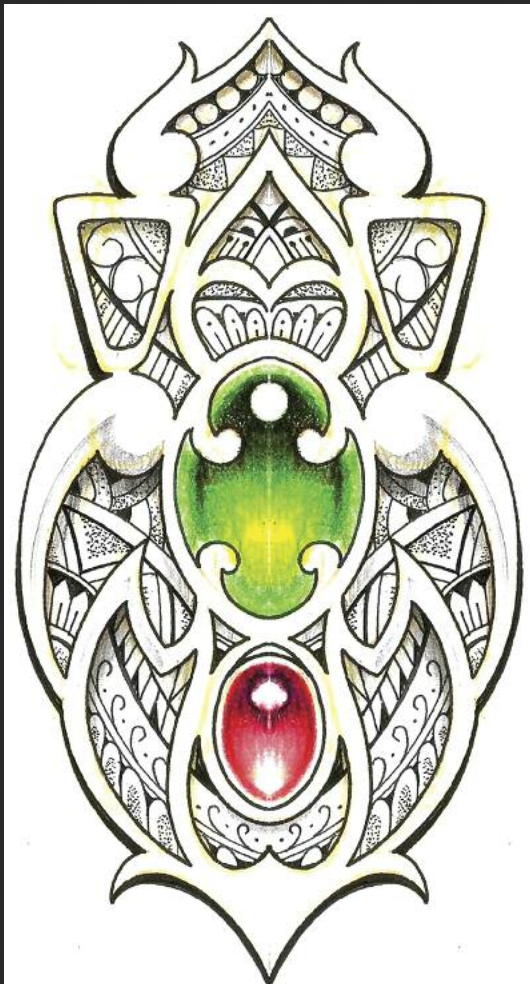


Chirag Jhala has a studio in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and is considered to be one of the elder statesmen of Indian tattooing. We met for a chat at the recent Goa Tattoo Convention.

"When I first opened my studio, back in 2004," Chirag tells me, "there were only two proper tattoo studios in Bombay, mine and one other. There were some studios in salons, and one in a doctor's clinic, but mainly it was scratchers doing tattoos from their houses." I comment that there seems to be a remarkable amount of creativity in Indian tattooing right now. "Yes," agrees Chirag. "Indian tattooists have a lot of talent now but they just don't have the exposure. The country's population is so enormous; there's great competition right from the start. Every day it's a tough battle for survival. You see a lot of good artists buckling under the pressure of trying to make their name."

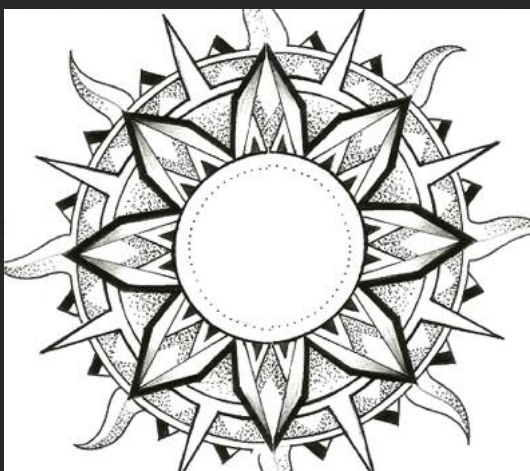
I ask Chirag if he feels the Indian market is more competitive than in other countries, particularly now that tattooing is growing so rapidly in popularity. "There are more and more studios opening, but thanks to the huge population there are always going to be plenty of customers. People have realised that tattooing has good potential as a





way to make a living, and that's why you see so many shops opening up. But the artists are having to step up their game now that everyone is seeing the standard of tattooing in the rest of the world. In the early days, we didn't have too many genres. We only had had black and grey realism, and the colour work was American traditional with a very limited palette. But today when we see the kind of work done by all these Russian artists who have really moved it up a notch, it pushes you and makes you feel that you need to do something more to improve yourself. And that's exactly what is happening."

"When I first started out," he continues, "I was just hungry to do any work that came my way, whatever it was. I was doing a lot of what we call Google work, the designs you find on the flash sites, but eventually I started learning how I could do the same designs but in a different way, picking out references and modifying them, seeing how to make them look unique. Drawing, drawing, drawing. That's how the creativity started flowing."





I ask Chirag if he did painting and drawing when he was a child? "I've always loved drawing, but I was never formally taught how to do it. I would just always be randomly sketching and doodling to kill time. I had the knack, but I never really thought that I could make it into a career." I wondered if there was any style or subject matter that he particularly enjoyed. "I was always fascinated by cartoons, comic books, action heroes... and religious figures too. So that's all I used to draw. And when you keep on drawing the same things over a period of time, you get better and better at it. Then you start getting creative with it, and start modifying it in your own way."

So how was Chirag first introduced to tattooing? "It was during my college days," he recalls. "A few of us guys were just chilling out and one of our friends came along with a fresh tattoo on his arm. That was the first time I'd ever seen a new tattoo and it kind of fascinated me. It was all bleeding - and I was interested in why a person would do that to himself - but at the same time it was looking awesome. So I got him to introduce me to the guy who had done the tattoo and I decided to get one done too. The tattooist was only in the next lane from me, so it was very convenient for me to visit him. After that, I used to hang around whenever he did a tattoo, trying to help him out with the set up, cleaning the equipment, doing whatever I could just to be there. He allowed me to see a lot of tattoos being done."



"I was working in a call centre at the time, and during long calls I would take my pen and start doodling designs. One of my friends saw what I was doing and suggested I should give tattooing a try, so I asked the tattooist if he would help me. He said my drawing was good, but told me that drawing a design was very different to tattooing a person. And he was right! My first tattoo was a tribal sun that took me five hours to finish! And we used to make our own needles back then too, so we had to check that the needles were OK throughout. I was super excited. I had to phone all my friends to tell them I'd just done my first tattoo. That's when it started rolling in for me."



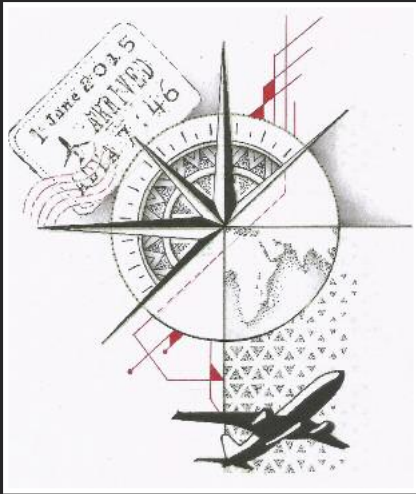
Chirag goes on to tell me that apprenticeships as such don't really exist in India. "A lot of tattooists take students under their wing, but it's not really an apprenticeship because nobody wants to dedicate too much time to it. They're very impatient. They see the older tattooists like us doing what we do and they want to be there, but they don't seem to realise that we spent years acquiring the necessary skills and experience. We've given time, energy and money to be where we are. We've worked hard to earn it. People nowadays want to skip that part. They want to learn it all in a month, then within another month they want to open up a studio, and in no time at all they want to start pulling out realistic portraits. It was two years, and about three hundred tattoos, before I opened my shop because I knew for a fact that I wasn't good enough until then. You need to get good enough



before you start up because it's all about the reputation. If your reputation isn't good then you're never going to get work."

I wondered if Indian artists are now doing the same as increasing numbers of artists in other countries – building up a body of great work before they expose it and explode onto the scene. "Yes, for some people it works that way," he tells me. "But for others you can see their constant growth over the years. Personally, I prefer this. People can see the potential in you, how you've grown up. My own work has changed along the way. In fact I made a conscious decision to change my work just a year ago. Previously I was doing fine linear geometric work, but the work I am doing now is completely different. What I realised is that a lot of artists are picking up particular genres, which in one way is a very good thing because you can explore your comfort zone, but you can also become very complacent. If you have one unique style, your client base becomes limited. People only come to you for that particular style and over a period of time it just becomes monotonous. There is no artistic challenge left."





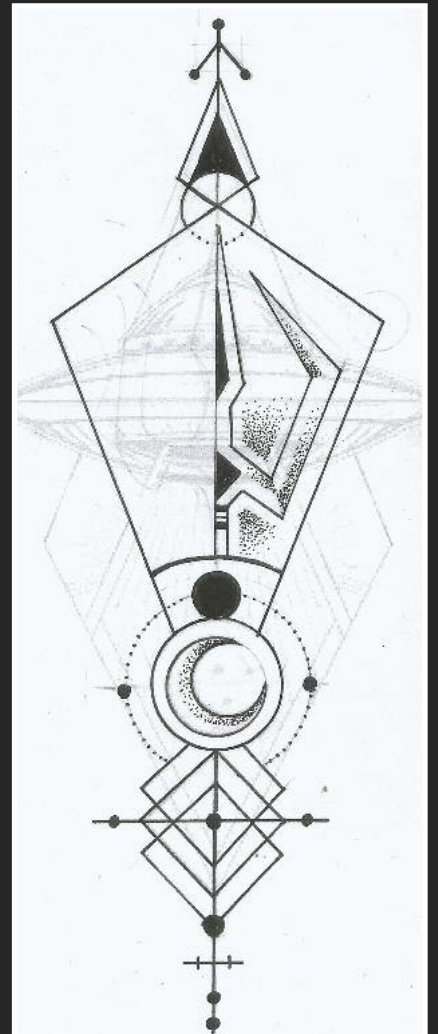
"I didn't want to be a one trick pony," Chirag continues. "I realised I have a very good eye for colour. Everyone in India says that colours are a challenge, but I just kept on using lots of them – and luckily the colours have started flowing to me! I take a design and keep adding colours... constantly checking the balance and the contrast... making sure I don't over-saturate it or over-complicate it. I just go with the feel, and luckily it just works for me. You have to adjust the colour balance for different kinds of skin. If I'm tattooing darker skin, I will probably not use more than three shades; but if I'm doing the same design on lighter skin, I can use around seven shades and have more subtle blends. The darker the skin, the more contrast you use. You have to be aware of what skin you are dealing with. I always tell all the Indian artists that it's a myth that colours don't come out well on Indian skin."

"People get excited about what I might be doing next. Next year I might pick up something completely different. I am now thinking I can merge different styles together, so that I get to do everything on the same canvas, and the client gets something absolutely unique – something that's definitely not one of your traditional designs. With nothing planned there's the potential for a lot of interesting things to happen. You mix in several different elements and it just pops open."



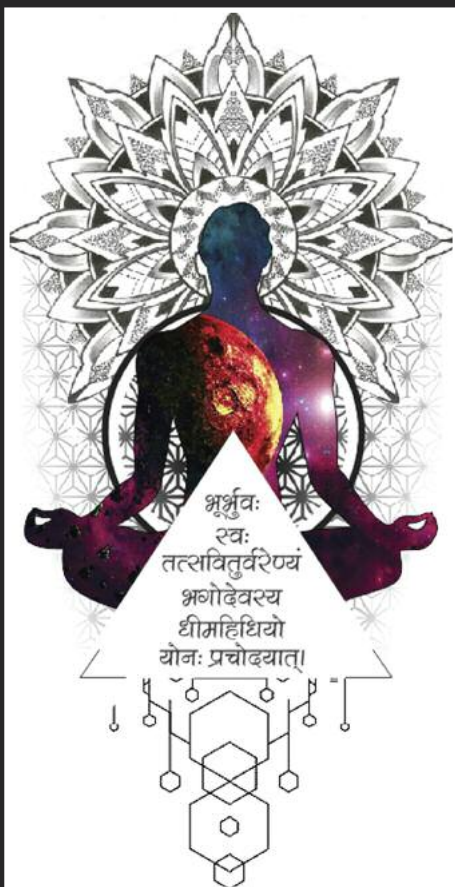
I ask Chirag how tattooing is being received in India now. "Tattooing has grown so much in the past decade. Even the most conservative people – or the people who were the most scared – are getting tattoos done today. But generally speaking, the artists don't get that much respect. It is getting better, but I think we're around fifty years behind other countries. We're moving in the right direction though, and we're quickly catching up."

And do artists have access to all the equipment they need? "Oh yes, it's much better now," Chirag tells me. "Tattooists are getting everything on a silver platter. They have everything that tattooists from other countries have – all the ready-made disposable needles and the lighter machines, and they don't have to clean out their tubes, tips, etc, any more because it's all sterile disposable stuff and you just throw it away. Back



in the day if you broke a spring and had to order a new one it took three or four weeks to arrive. But the struggle we used to have gave us a deeper respect for this art than the young tattooists have today. If a young tattooist asks me about the machine I'm using, I always tell them I know they're only asking because they think if they use the same machine they'll be able to do the same tattoos... then when they don't get the same result they'll just blame their equipment. They don't realise they need to take time to learn their skills. I always advise artists to do what feels right for them and not try to copy others"

I am curious to know whether there is any official regulation of tattooing in India. "Tattooing isn't even recognised as a trade or profession, so there are no regulations as yet," Chirag explains. "Technically, we come into the same category as other types of artists, so the tattooist and the painter are the same. And because of this there is no official body or any licence needed, and you can open up a shop in a day. That is good and bad at the same time. I definitely think there should be some system of regulation - preferably with the involvement of tattooists, because the government will never understand what the tattoo industry is all about. This would help to eliminate a lot of the studios that are not good, where the artists are not



skilled or the standards of hygiene are not maintained. It should be a bit harder to open up a shop! I think if this kind of regulation came into play, you would probably see around fifty percent of the street shops in India closing down. They would either have to step up or step off."

I round off our conversation by asking Chirag about his future plans. "This last year I have been doing a lot of guest spots in India, but I plan to do some outside of India in the coming year, and generally travel more. Now that my work is being seen more widely, opportunities are opening up for me. I have plans to visit Germany and France, and I would love to go to the Singapore convention. I also need to spend some time in my own head. Every year, in May, I take time out of everyday life (and the stresses of the studio) to trek the Himalayas for a couple of weeks. It's my break. I don't take a phone, there are no electric lights, I sleep in a tent and only eat basic food. Lots of walking and only nature. It really helps to get rid of the stresses and open up the mind again."

"As for tattooing, you have to do things that feel right at the right time. I want to try out new things and experiment more. I want to come up with something that moves away from all the realism and the styles that other tattooists are doing. I want to use my creativity to come up with something that nobody has seen before. I want people to ask, 'How did you come up with that?' I have been in tattooing longer than most tattooists in India, and I want to continually push myself further than the others. I believe that the day that you say you are the best, that's your last day. I would rather say that I am still growing!"

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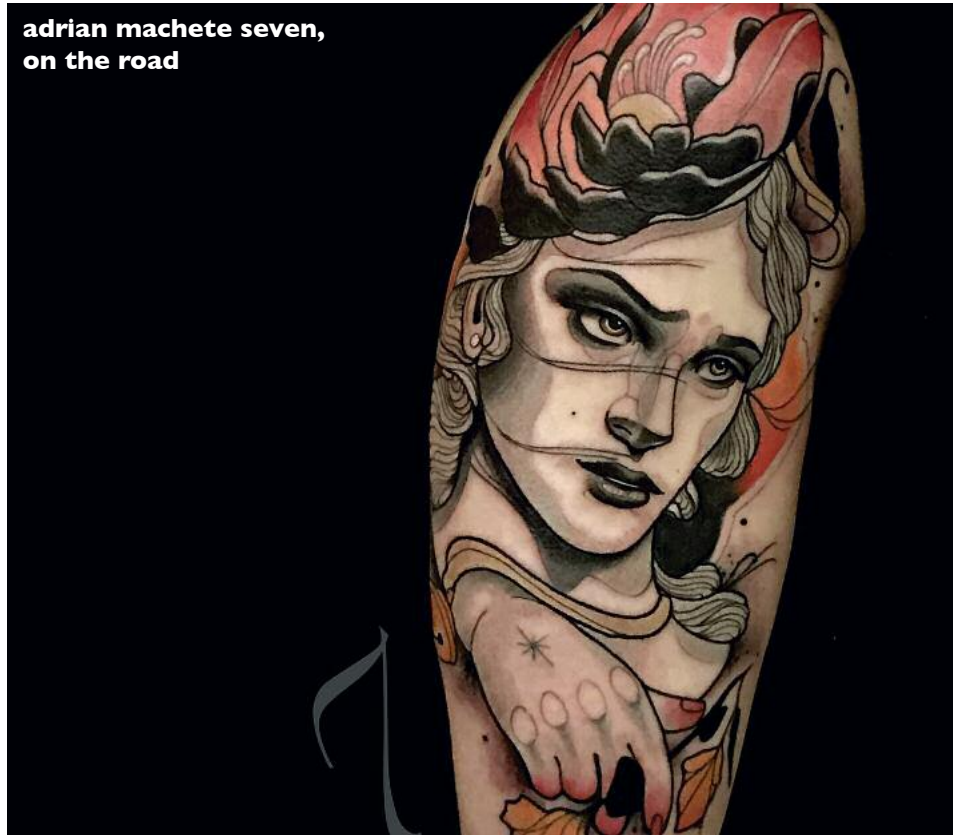


GALLERY

alan hinds, tatt house



adrian machete seven,
on the road



ballsy, factotum



christopher kenyon,
true 'til death



kopie,



sikes mulligan-ward,
king's ship

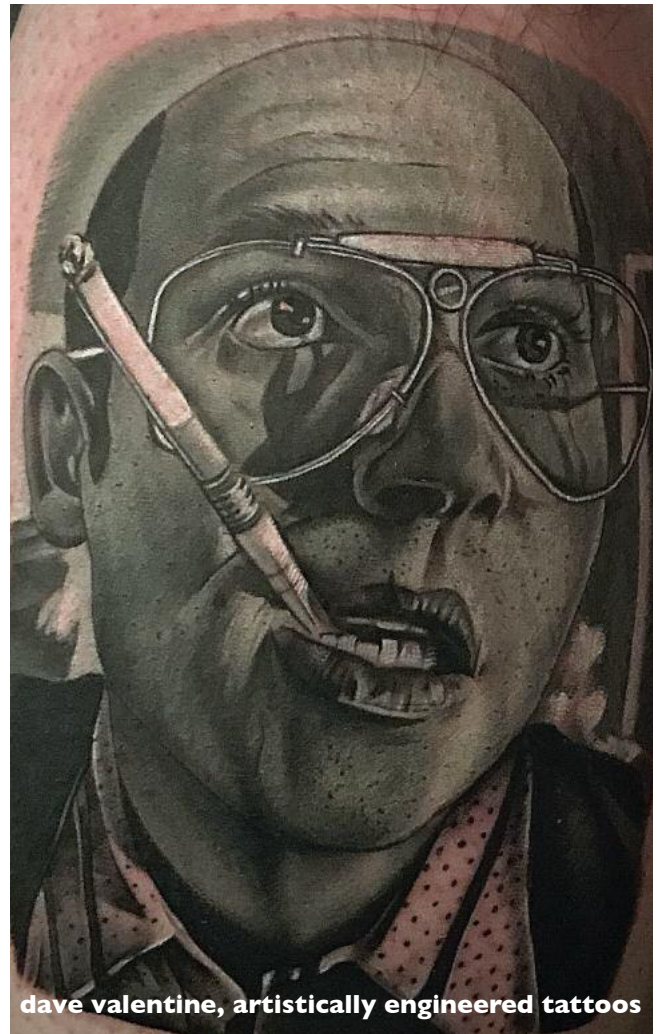


santa perpetua, black sails

pete, royston ink



lukasz trawczynski, the modern electric tttoo co



dave valentine, artistically engineered tattoos



ellie richmond, modern body art



hollie west, indigo tattoo



**will sparling,
black dog tattoos**



chavez pattinson, borderline tattoo collective



steven gilmour, mr greg tattoo



matte bokis,
zoi tattoo (sweden)



luke cormier, screaming gypsy tattoo (canada)



hoshmoo, inksmiths of london



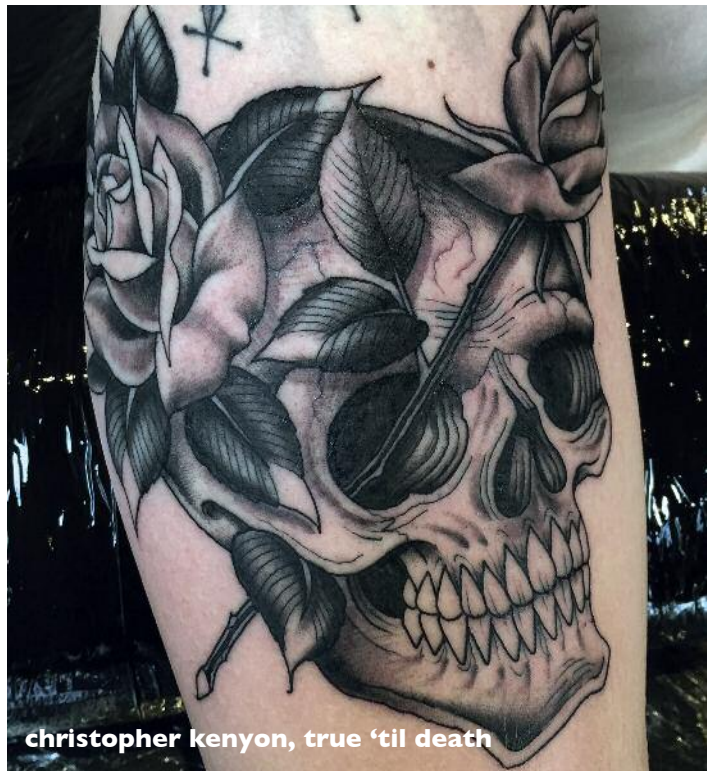
sandro secchin, old london road



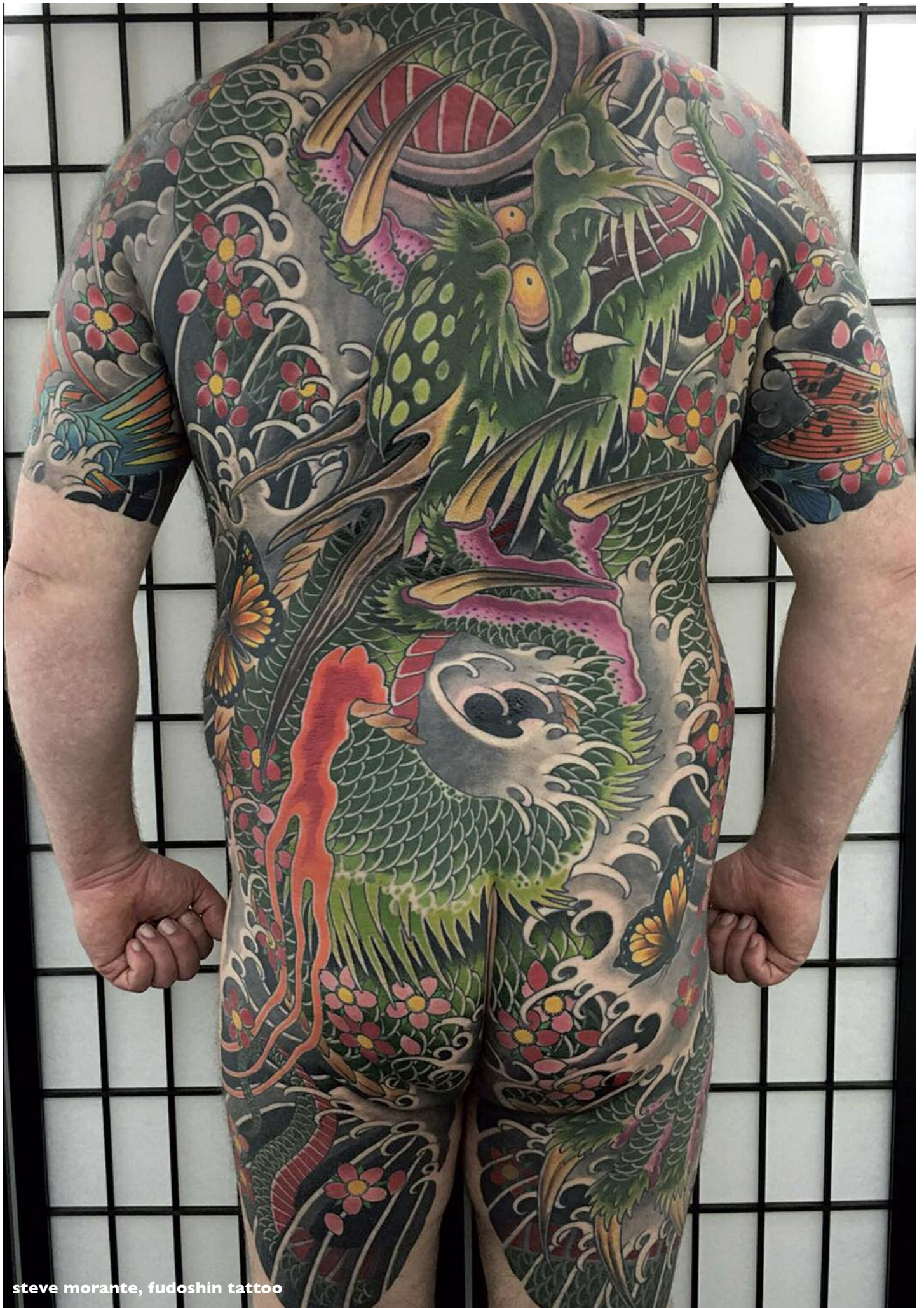
david hodes, mine shaft tattoo (usa)



george bonner, the circle



christopher kenyon, true 'til death



steve morante, fudoshin tattoo

tom grosz
eightfold tattoo



paul booth, last rites (usa)



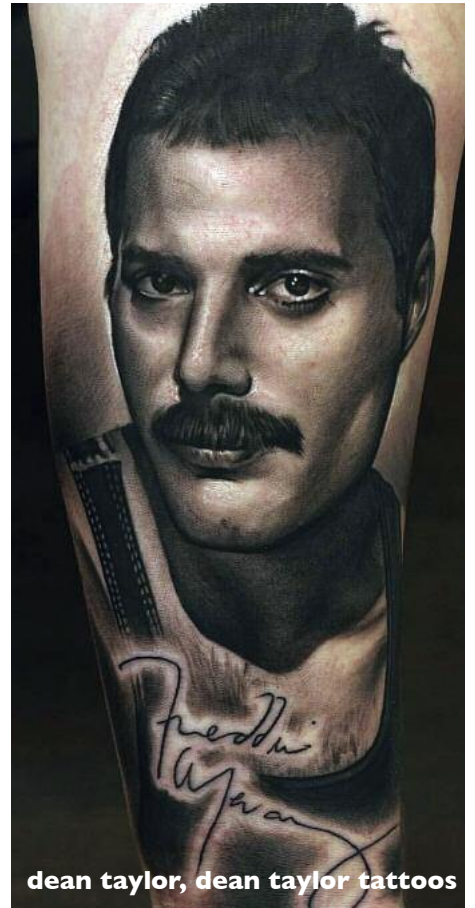
eric boggs, arlight tattoo studio (usa)



ben nuthink
valhalla tattoo



john anderton, nemesis tattoo



dean taylor, dean taylor tattoos



amelia whitney, club tattoo (usa)

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kristen ferrell

Interview by Lizzy Guy
Pictures courtesy of Kristen Ferrell



Kristen Ferrell's art is full of subtly presented paradoxes - the beautiful versus the grotesque, innocence versus anger. Originally from a conservative religious background, her work is a way of externalising the conflict and rage within, an attempt to sane in a world of madness.

Let's begin at the beginning. Tell us what's made you the artist you are today. I grew up in the sleepy suburbs outside of Kansas City. My biological parents were teenage runaways who knew enough to not try to raise me themselves, so I was put up for adoption and raised by the most amazing and loving parents ever. They are deeply religious, and were incredibly innocent, so they weren't quite prepared for how I was as a child. I had a pretty violent temper and a tendency to be out of control, and I was put into therapy at a really young age. That therapy started teaching me to channel all the rage-chaos in my head into drawings and artwork. But teenhood happened, and my rebelliousness kicked into high gear, so my parents put me in an evangelical Southern Baptist home for "troubled teens" located in the woods of Missouri for two years. These were the people who taught me how frightening religion really is, how destructive its hateful message of condemnation can be, and how little sense it all makes. It taught me to be a very well-versed atheist, and to fight scripture with scripture, and I began channelling all that into my art.



So art is a form of therapy for you?

My art has always been therapeutic for me, even in childhood. I am pretty opposed to talking about feelings and emotions (whether that's healthy or not, it's just how I am), so this is how I stay sane. It's how I process horrible things that happen, and vent what's going on inside my head. Even if I never had another gallery show ever again, I'd still be making my art and stacking it up in my closet. I make my work because I *have* to make my work.

Have you had any formal artistic training?

Yes. I went to art school at the University of Kansas. I studied Fine Art, with Intaglio Printmaking as my special subject. But since I didn't have access to a gigantic printing press at home after I graduated, I began painting. I don't believe that people need art school to be artists at all... but what you do learn in a high pressure academic setting is how to work through your artist blocks to meet a deadline, and how to have really thick skin. My main teacher was legendary for delivering the most brutal critiques that would send students running from the studio in tears. But it was good for us. It made us fight to justify our art, it toughened us up, and it pushed us to create better work that couldn't be ripped apart. You have to know how to handle yourself in an eloquent and professional manner when a critic comes up to you at a show and tells you they think your work is "overrated shock-garbage". You have to know when to defend your art, and when to listen to the criticism. Because we can always be better at what we do, and a lot of the criticism out there is valid.





Looking back, did you ever imagine that you could be as successful as you are now?

Absolutely not. I never expected to ever have a gallery show. I put myself through art school because I wanted to have a degree under my belt, but I didn't care about doing anything else. In my senior year in college I started getting offers for small group shows around the country, and it just slowly grew from there. I am so incredibly grateful for every show and project I've had the privilege of being a part of because I never thought I'd have these opportunities.

The influence of Hieronymus Bosch is very apparent in your work. What first drew you to his paintings?

The softness with the horror. He was the first artist I had ever seen who truly made nightmares beautiful. It was like he was in my head. I was instantly obsessed.



Who and what else influences you?

I get really wrapped up in music that goes along with the same themes as my art – pretty and mean: The Paper Chase, Andy Prieboy, Cake (don't judge me - their music is adorable and totally grumpy), Murder by Death, etc. I am just really drawn to those juxtapositions.

Do you prefer to work from your own ideas or with commissions?

I actually like doing both. When I work too much with my own ideas, I tend to get too deeply into my own head. I get sick of myself and all my thoughts. But when I'm doing commissions or a themed show with Copycat Violence, the art collective of which I'm a member, it helps me to step outside of my own bullshit. Creating something from someone else's idea forces me to get inspired in a totally different way, and that helps me grow (and also lets me take a break from my own brain).



Do you ever feel 'stuck', and how do you overcome that?

I get stuck *all the time!* But that is where the art school training comes in handy, because I just push through it. When I can't think of anything to draw or paint, I just keep drawing. It doesn't matter if it's good or terrible (it's usually terrible), I just keep doing it. There are

so many paintings I've made that I *hate*, but it doesn't matter. Nobody can make perfect work all the time, and usually the majority of what we create isn't good, but you have to just keep creating. The more crap work you get out of your head, the more likely you are to get to the good stuff that is buried beneath.

What do you do with the work you're not happy with? Do you revisit it at a later date, destroy it, or hide it?

If they're just drawings or paintings that have no deadline attached them, I put them aside for a day or so and then come back to them with a clear head. I've got a couple pieces that I've been "coming back to" for years... and they many never get finished! But if I'm having to make work for an exhibit and it just isn't coming together or I hate what I'm making, I have no choice but to finish it and put it on the gallery walls. There are *many* pieces out there in collectors' homes that I'm unhappy with – but surprisingly some of my least favourite pieces have been my most popular. So just because we are unhappy with our work, it doesn't mean it won't speak to someone else!



Tell us about the symbolism in your work.

Studying art history, one of the things I fell in love with was the symbolism. Every object in those old religious paintings has its own specific meaning, and if you know what the symbols mean you can figure out the story the painting is trying to tell. I *adore* that. It's a secret language. So I use all those old symbols, but I put them in modern terms to tell my own stories. And since I don't like to talk about feelings, it's the perfect way for me to vent about upsetting things without actually having to talk about them (because not many people can figure out what the visual code in my paintings means). For example, each finger



on your hand has a very different and specific meaning. If I paint a hand with the thumbs chopped off it means an inability to function. If I cut off the ring fingers, it's loss of love. Or if I show the fingers chopped off but sewn on all wrong, it's a failed attempt to function. I have a lot of fun playing with the puzzle of it.

Do you believe all art has to have a meaning?

I don't think art has to have a meaning, but it does have to make you think or feel something. I know that most people won't have any idea what my pieces are specifically about – and that's OK! People come up with their own meanings, and make my art their own story... which makes it that much more special. People want to connect to things, so even if art doesn't have a meaning, people are going to give it one. It's just what humans do, and it's pretty awesome.



One thing that really strikes me in your work is the perfect balance between the cute and the macabre...

The funny thing is, I never really set out to make dark or macabre work. I have these ideas in my head of images I want to achieve – and in my head they are just lovely! But as soon as I start working on them, they get darker. As I get deeper into the painting, more blood gets added, limbs get severed, and I end up with these fluffy and pretty messes. The road to hell was paved with good intentions...

How did you get into the clothing and accessories business?

It came about in the early 2000s when I first started doing gallery shows. Because I've always had a younger audience who can't usually afford original pieces, I decided to screenprint images onto t-shirts and handbags to sell at the shows (rather like a band having a merch table at a gig). They did really well, and boutiques started carrying them. After a few years I was taking them to trade shows, and stores all over the US and Europe were carrying them. I was able to add accessories and home goodies to the range. But the financial crash of 2007 killed off much of the business (it shut down so many boutiques and galleries and everyone's dreams just kind of hit the pavement at that time). The past couple of years it's started to come back pretty solid, so I'm in the process of revamping all of that right now to get it in full swing again. Actually, even though the financial crash of 2007 was destructive, it was also enlightening. Every artist, gallery and small business that I worked with got destroyed – myself included – and every single one of us was broke, desperate and 100% fucked. But being able to find a way through that (and still create art while getting side jobs to bring in money for the family, because art wasn't going to be paying the bills for years to come) made me stronger. If I could make it through that without giving up, I know I'm going to be fine no matter what happens.

Tell us about Copycat Violence.

Copycat Violence is a pop-surrealist art collective and I've been a member for two years now. In my fifteen-plus years of being a professionally exhibiting artist, it's the only place I've experienced true and sincere artistic



kinship and cooperation. It's a talented powerhouse of artists who work seamlessly and tirelessly together; who support each other, and who are just *there* for each other. We do group shows and projects as a collective, we promote each other's individual shows and projects, and sometimes we are simply moral support for each other. The art world can be very fickle, catty and competitive, so this collective is a rare oasis – an example of the wonderful things that can happen if artists join together to lift each other up.

How do you achieve a healthy work-life balance?

I used to take on every show and project offered to me while running my business at the same time – as well as helping my husband with his record label. Doing all this plus raising a kid, I almost burnt myself out completely. These past few years, I've made a conscious effort to scale back the number of shows I do a year and the workload I put on myself so that I can have a healthy balance that includes





actually living (and getting some sleep too). I don't produce the volume of work that I used to, but I am definitely happier. And it frees up my mind to be more creative.

Do you have any upcoming projects?

I'm in the process of relaunching my clothing range with all-new goodies. And right now my husband and I are starting a hilarious new apparel project that is a total secret – but it will be ready in a couple months and it's going to be soooo funny. There's a handful of shows coming up around the States, and if you go to the Copycat Violence Facebook page, there are going to be special art auctions in which I'll be participating.



It's awesome that so many people have had elements of your paintings tattooed on them. Can you remember when this first started? How did you feel about it?

This is actually the coolest thing that has come out of being an artist, and it blows me away completely. It was pretty early on in my exhibiting career that people started contacting me through my website and sending me pics of tattoos they had gotten of the drawings and doodles I had put up on MySpace (this was way back when MySpace was still relevant). I would proudly showcase the tattoo pics... which led to more people getting tattoos... and so on. Each and every one of them is amazing.

Do the fans or the tattooists ever contact you beforehand to ask your permission?

Sometimes, yes, but they usually just surprise me afterwards. I do not understand *at all* why any artist would get bitchy about this. That's just crazy to me. Someone out there loves your work so much that they get it embedded into their skin for the rest of their life... That's the biggest honour an artist could ever ask for! I have a special section of my website where I post all the pictures that people send me of the tattoos they have of my work, and I sing their praises all over social media. These art fans have gone above and beyond with their love of my work, and they make me so happy! Artists who get upset about this are looking at it wrong and not seeing the beauty in it. Because it really is a very special gift.

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Singapore has been on the tattoo map for quite some time now. Artists such as Jess Yen and Shane Tan have headed west to pursue their tattoo dreams and in doing so have inspired a whole generation of artists back home – one of whom is C K Low. Though still very much based in the city he loves (at his own shop, C.K. Tattoo Singapore) he travels a great deal, returning home with newly acquired knowledge to apply to his own work and share with Singapore's blossoming tattoo community.



One thing I found out about early on in our interview is the truly multicultural nature of Singapore. CK was brought up in one of the many high-rises that are home to the majority of the island's population. He learnt English at school (it's the official language of Singapore) but, as was the case for numerous families in the block, Chinese was spoken at home. No single culture, religion or aesthetic is dominant in Singapore, and when CK was growing up, they were all around him and very much part of everyday life. I asked if he could remember which visual language it was that first spoke to him. "Comics and cartoons!" he answers straight away.





"I don't really have any art background," he continues, "and nobody in my family was an artist, but I've always loved it. Drawing in particular. I would copy things from Dragon Ball, Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers... that sort of stuff. But it was just another hobby for me. Actually, I was really into sports [*Slight understatement! He was in the national Taekwondo squad - ed*] and that kept me very busy."

As time passed CK's love of drawing continued to grow and when he finished high school he decided he wanted a creative future. But circumstances conspired against him. "I wanted to get a diploma in design, but my results weren't so good. Then I tried to get to art school, but again I couldn't get in. So just to please my parents I got a diploma in property development! [*He bursts out laughing*] It seems so irrelevant now."

It took three years for CK to get his irrelevant diploma, but one very relevant event did take place during that time: He got his first tattoo. The artist who did it was in his Taekwondo squad. "He eventually became my mentor," CK tells me.







As well as spending three years getting his diploma, CK had to do two years' National Service. But he decided to start his apprenticeship at Melvin Tattoo at the same time. Monday to Friday he was in the army camp, and at the weekend he would go to the studio. I was curious to know how he felt about National Service, a concept that is now so alien to most of us in the UK. "We have to accept it," he says. "I had to look at it in a positive way. I knew I was going to be spending two years there; I just wanted to try my best and see what I could get out of it for myself. It was a great experience. I met all sorts of people. I became a platoon sergeant, so good communication skills were vital. I also learnt another valuable life lesson: you can't please everyone all the time, but you must at least try to make things fair."

When CK left the army he started to work full-time as a tattoo artist, then after a year or so he began to travel with his mentor. "I felt like my eyes were opened. I went to conventions, met some great artists, saw so much... but I didn't really know what direction I was going in. My mentor didn't push me, but he did tell me that one day I would find my own style. And he told me that is when I would really begin to love tattooing."





At first CK was drawn to realism, but as time went on his fascination with the work of Filip Leu, Shige and other masters of contemporary Japanese tattooing began to grow. "I began to study their work," he tells me. "I found it so interesting, the composition and the flow. I wanted to understand the art, how to use the images to create flow across the body." And that is now the path that he is on. But he is also aware of channelling his earlier influences. "I think, subconsciously, I am still inspired by comics. My art is a little cartoony, even if it's just the colours that I play with. Those influences I had when I was very young are still incredibly strong. Of course I am always trying to improve my work. There is so much for me to learn. I am trying to push myself to the next level, but I don't know when I will achieve that."



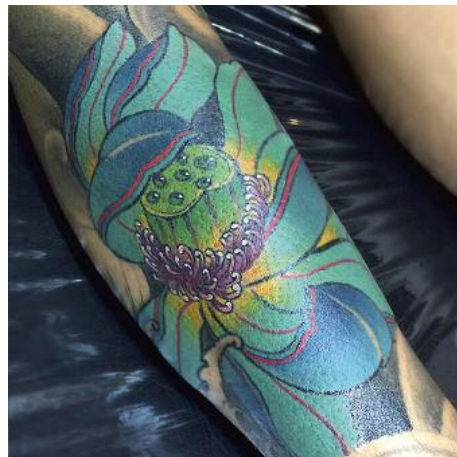
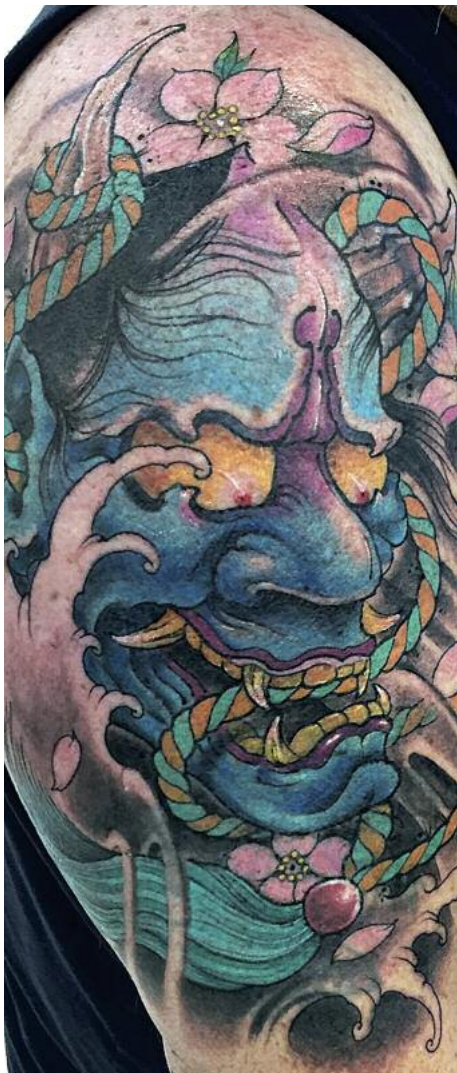


I was interested to hear CK's opinion of the Singapore scene and how it's developing. "Things are getting better. It's a little more open now, but unlike Europe we don't have conventions every weekend, or our own magazines, so the tattoo education level for consumers is not very high. But social media is helping people understand the possibilities. We have a buoyant economy but a relatively small population, which also has an effect. It's the artist's job to educate and show people what tattooing can be. But I think we have definitely gone up a level recently."

It's obvious to me that CK cares very much about the development of tattooing in Singapore. His goal is to elevate tattooing within society in general, and he has a plan. "As artists we are united, but we do have politics here in Singapore, the same as everywhere. I would like to open a gallery to showcase pieces by tattoo artists working in the city. Just a small place, but somewhere that will allow people to walk in and view the individual artists' work and understand what it is they are doing. No pressure, just a calm environment where they can spend time without any feeling of intimidation. I think it would give people a much greater appreciation of what we do, and help bring artists together too."

CK's heart is certainly in the right place and, when it comes to his career in tattooing, his aim is true. He understands the pitfalls of social media and is not allowing himself to be wooed by the reality TV myth. I certainly look forward to seeing how his work influences the Singapore scene.

To keep abreast of all that is CK head to:
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Cesar Mesquita

Black n' Gold

LEGACY



When you hear the name Cesar Mesquita, you might think of the renowned tattooist from Black Garden; the Brazilian artist who creates tattoos that are not only beautiful to look at, but also technically sublime. However, over the past few years, Cesar has been gaining a great reputation within tattooing for another skill - building coil machines. From making them for personal use to selling machines worldwide, Cesar's brand Black n' Gold Legacy has really been gaining momentum since it was established three years ago. We recently caught up with Cesar in his Norwich workshop to learn more about his passion for tattoo equipment and his journey into making machines.

Have you always been interested in building machines?

Ever since I learned to tattoo, seventeen years ago, I have been obsessed with how the machines work. In Brazil it was quite hard to get hold of equipment and, after I bought my first tattoo machine, I was really fascinated by it. After two years of tattooing, I realised I needed to understand the tools. I bought the best I could and began learning what I needed from my machines. I started questioning myself, as to what I was doing in my work and

connecting the two. So, if I was tattooing in black and grey, and my machine was designed for packing colour, I had to find something that was suitable for grey wash, or tweak the machine. If I wanted a soft shader, I had to figure out what I needed - not too much stroke and a different speed, so I could build the shade. Then I started taking notes - a shader should be like this; more speed, softer stroke and so on.

I began building machines to improve my own work. I didn't think of selling them. It's like a

puzzle with hundreds of pieces, but one piece missing. I was after that final piece of the puzzle. I needed to understand and figure out the whys and hows; what makes a machine run well. I researched older frames and tried to figure out what makes them so good; from the coils and the geometry of the machine, to the metals involved.



What is the appeal of the coil machine for you?

I want to keep the tradition of the coil alive. I think it's slowly dying. When I started, I loved my first coil machine. I still have it! I think that for tattooers, coils make a big difference. If you know how to use one, you can see the difference in the work. The coil machine teaches you how to tattoo properly. It forces you to understand the technical side of applying the tattoo. If you understand this, your tattooing will improve. I do use Cheyenne Hawks from time to time, mainly for packing colour in small tattoos, but I prefer coil shaders for my backgrounds. I agree that the new rotaries are great and they have their place, but I would never give up my coils for lining.



How important is it for a tattooist to understand the workings of a machine?

Tattooing is not just about your artistic skills, it's about how you deal with, and understand, the tools. You have to make the two work together. It's like a musical instrument: you could be the best musician with the best instrument, but if you don't understand how the instrument plays, then it's not going to work. I think every tattooer needs to take time to understand their tools, even down to things like how many elastic bands you use; too many will give too much pressure and strangle the machine. The most important thing to learn is re-tuning your machines. You can't complain about the way your machine is running, when you haven't taken the time to re-tune. I re-tune my machines every two to three weeks, depending on how often I use them.

How did you start selling your machines to tattooists?

It was Rodrigo Souto and my wife Leticia who

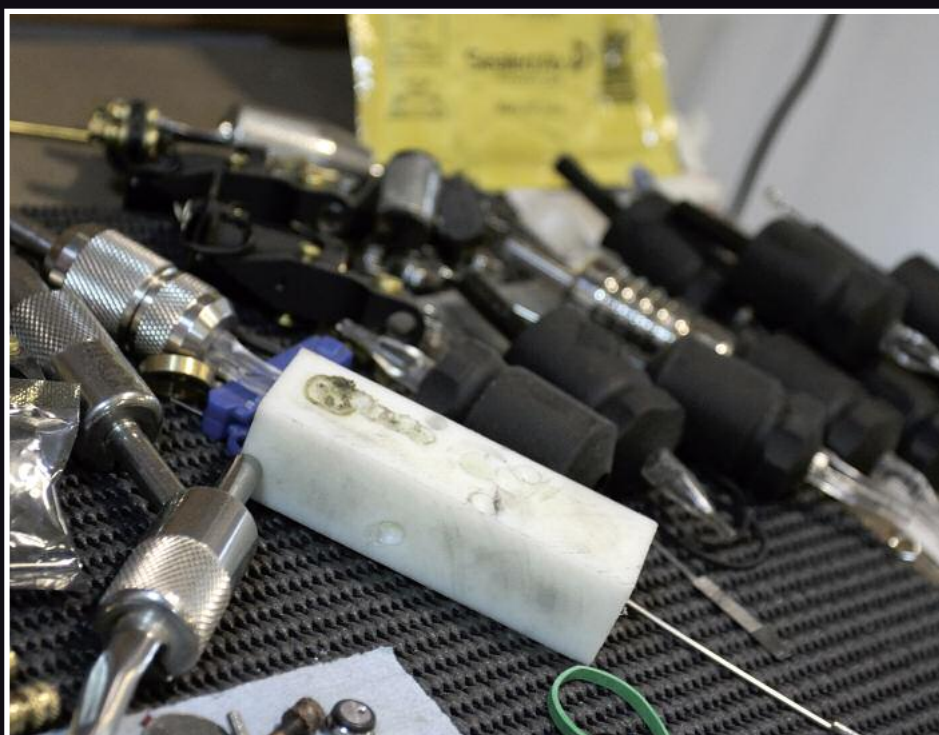
suggested it. I built machines for myself, because I liked doing so. Then the guys from the shop would ask to try a machine and then they'd keep it. So I'd build another one for myself, and another of the guys would ask to try it and then they'd keep it, and so on. Then one of the guys asked to buy one. I was flattered that someone wanted to buy one from me; not from a monetary perspective, but because it gave a different value to my work. They really wanted the machine and were willing to pay because it was good. That's when I thought I'd be happy to supply good tools for tattooists.

What did you want to achieve by making your own machines?

One thing I take pride in is getting the balance right between weight and power; between giving the machine a good weight as a tool, but keeping it light so it can be used again and again without discomfort. It's a problem a lot of tattooists have – wanting to keep using their machines, but finding them too heavy. That's one of the reasons so many tattooers give up coil machines in favour of lightweight rotaries. That was one of my starting points – how can I keep the machine running well but make it lighter? It was tricky to figure out how to manage that. The metal I use is quite unusual for tattoo machines but it makes a low vibration machine, with a better connectivity, which in turn allows me to have a lighter frame.

What other things did you want to change?

The power itself; how you make a machine run at a certain voltage. There is a balance. Too much power and the machine won't run the way it should. It's like a Formula One car: it takes a few tweaks to get the power you want, but without blowing up the engine! I know an F1 car can do 350kph but, if it's not tweaked properly, when you get to 300kph the car will explode, because the engine wasn't set up perfectly to hold the power. It's quite tricky. It's a delicate curve.



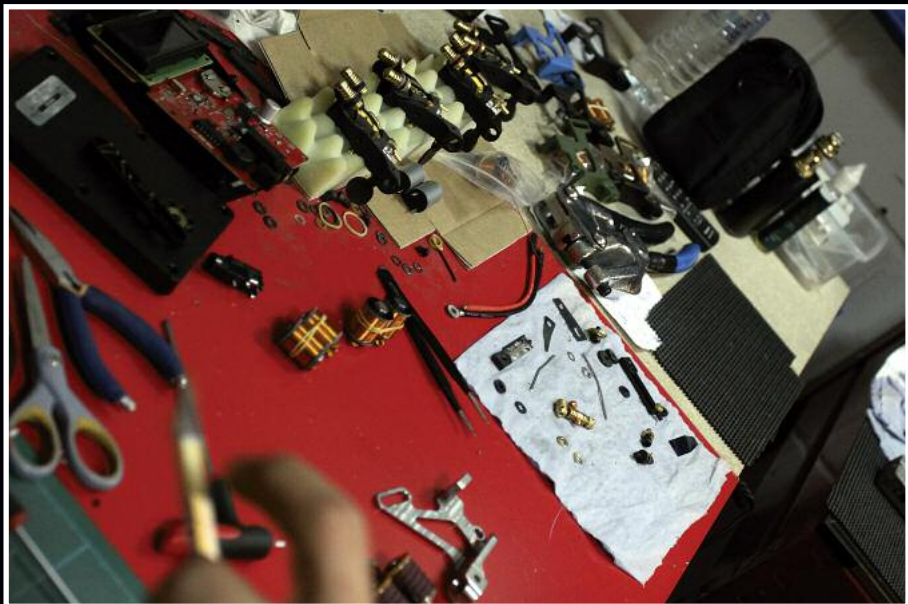
How do you build your custom machines?

If someone asks me for a custom machine, I look at their work to see what they do. From that point, I'll ask them questions about how they work, such as how fast they tattoo, what size needles they use the most. Then I'll determine how I can give them what they want. I combine their requirements with my technical knowledge to create something that will work best for them.

I work out the geometry of the frames – what will work well with the set up of the machine, the capacitors and the speed. Even things like the length of stroke that the tattooist wants. I need to get the correct pieces for the puzzle.

When I first started making custom machines and selling to tattooers, I would send a list of questions to them. They were really surprised that I asked for so much information but that made it easier for me to create exactly what they were looking for.

I try all my machines before sending them off, but there's always an element of doubt as to whether the machines are going to work for the client. I usually give it a week between sending a machine out and contacting the client to check whether it's OK. If there are problems, I need to know so I can improve or get them sorted. There's no such thing as bad feedback. All feedback is good. That's how you acquire more knowledge.



Do you feel disheartened if something doesn't work as you expect it to?

You have to make those errors and keep trying to get what you want. I get frustrated if it's not working. But it makes me think of Thomas Edison when he was inventing the light bulb. It took over a thousand attempts to get it to work. When he was asked "How did it feel to fail 1000 times?", he said "I didn't fail 1000 times; the light bulb was an invention with 1000 steps." If I'm feeling frustrated, I think of that quote, take a break and get back to it!



How long does it take to put together a custom machine?

With the list I have now it's between 4 and 6 weeks. I'm trying to be responsive; we live in a world where people want things yesterday, but I do need time to consider every aspect and make sure it's right. With my standard power liners (suitable for between 5 and 14 rounds) and fine liners (suitable for between 3 and 7 types), they can be up on the website as soon as they're made.

Black n' Gold Legacy has been going for about three years now and it's growing fast. Was it difficult to get your name established at the start?

Yeah, it was hard. You need to gain the trust of the tattooists first. As a tattooer, that's what happens. When you start your career, you need to show your work and prove that you're good enough, then gain the trust of clients, then build up the clientele. It's the same with machines – you need to prove that you're doing the best for them and that you want to provide something good. It's a lot of pressure, especially when you're renowned for being a tattooer. I always test things myself and with my peers before I put them on the market, so I know they're great products.



Are your machines entirely hand-built?

The first ones were entirely built by hand, where I welded the frames and everything. That's where I figured out and tweaked my geometry, until I had something I was happy with. Some of my machines still have handmade frames, but most of them are now CNC (Computer Numerical Control) cut. Some people think this means that they're not handmade, but handmade doesn't have to be 100%. I chose CNC because it means the precision of the frame is exact, down to the millimetre. I need everything to be precise. It's not cheap to cut the frames this way but I know each frame is exactly the same so if there's a problem, I know it's not the frame.

If I know something works, I'll continue to use it; for example, with the coils, I'll use a specific core, copper and capacitor. The machine is still handmade, because I have to build it and tune it. For some people, the factory element devalues them a little bit. They think I'm cheating but I disagree. I'm just looking to give them the best they can.

Do you think the stigma of 'factory made' is to do with the rise of cheap knock-offs, readily available on public selling sites?

I've seen machines for £5! I've been accused of buying cheap supplies from Asia. People need to remember that there are thousands of factories and there are some who are really good, who are willing to provide great products. It doesn't mean that they're cheap

though. They're using the best materials, which obviously costs them money as well; it's all connected. There is a stigma that anything made in the East is cheap, which isn't necessarily the case.

For my needles, I use the best stainless steel that comes from Germany, which is then shipped to China and made into needles there. I went to Asia for a month, researching factories. I went to the source. I wanted to see how things were made, how everything was sterilised and so on. I asked for certification, invoices, everything. When I spoke to the factory I use, we agreed what had to be done, and I was willing to pay for that.

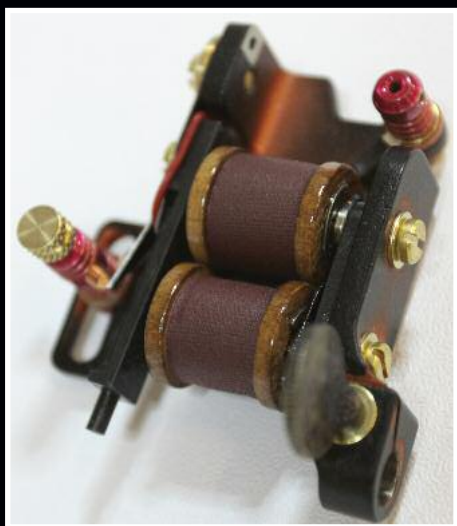


Aside from the coil machines and the needles, do you have other equipment that you're selling or developing?

I'm working on a straight drive rotary and one that's coil-like. The coil-like one is going to combine a rotary with the feel of coils. I don't personally like straight drive rotaries, but I know a lot of people do, and I get asked for them. That's the thing, when you start growing as a supplier, you have to supply the things that people need and ask for. I've also developed a unique carbon-based disposable tube. I found that when I used plastic tubes, I lost power and precision, so I went back to researching materials.

That's why it stopped being a hobby, because I was spending so much time and money on each element. At the end of the day, if you're going to make something good, that you use yourself, people will start asking for it. If I can provide the best, why not? I've already done most of the hard work by developing and researching everything. It's just a matter of connecting the business side with the emotional side, and being proud of what I achieve and what I do.

I'd also like to make inks. When you have a good pigment, it's great to work with, you're glued to it. I've already been researching pigments and 'recipes'. I'd like to start making prototypes and testing later this year. I want to the same feeling of achievement that I've had with my coil machines. That's what I'm addicted to. It's great to hear that I've helped to improve people's work.

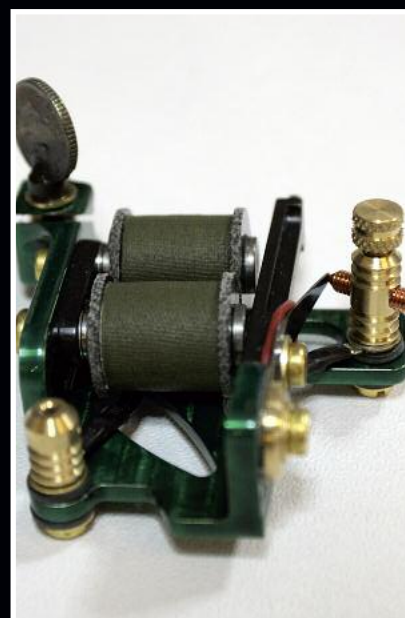


Where do you want to be in five years time?

Established as one of the top brands in the world. There's so much crap on the market. It's unfair that good tattooers are losing the drive because of it. The value of it is being lost. I want to fight to get to the top and establish myself. Take Jimmy from Lux Supplies in America, he's really proud that everything he supplies is the best, there is no middle ground. Eventually, I will need to employ other people. Logistically, it's becoming a lot of work to do by myself, and quite hard to balance being a husband, father, tattooer, builder ... and everything else!

How can tattooists buy from you?

From my website www.blackgoldlegacy.com or if I'm at a convention I will usually take some pre-made machines with me.



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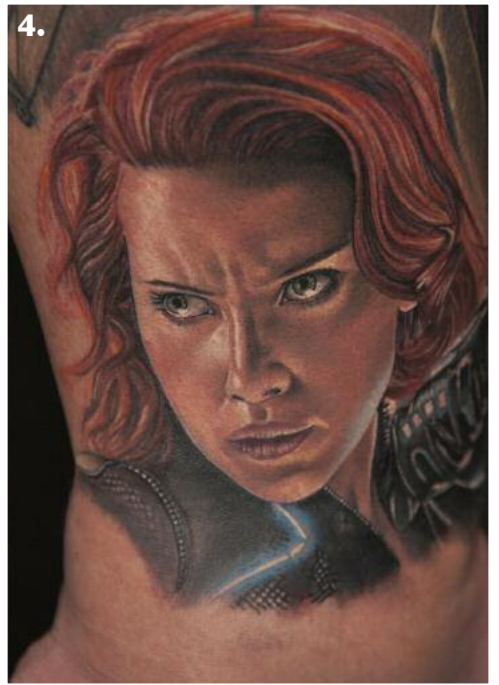
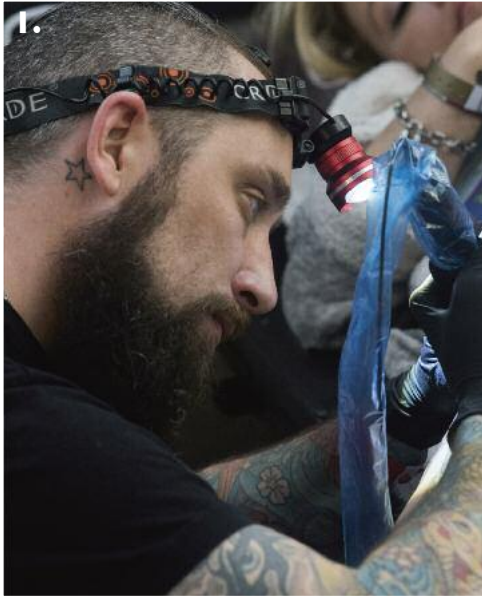


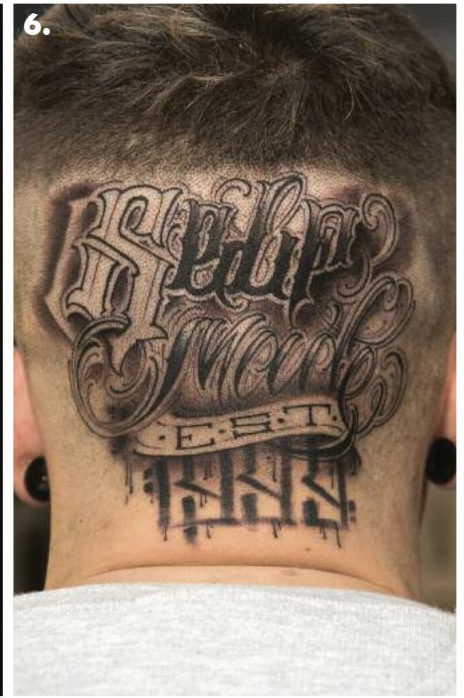
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THE TATTOO COLLECTIVE 2017

'The Tattoo Collective' was the intriguing name given to a convention that recently took place at The Old Truman Brewery on Brick Lane in London's East End. It was billed as a back-to-basics event – just tattooists and tattoo art – and its aim was to showcase the very best contemporary work from British and Irish studios.

Mention the Old Truman Brewery and it will bring back fond memories of the early years of the London Tattoo Convention for anybody who lucky enough to be there, and I must admit the return of tattooing to that unique venue felt like a really big thing. Those first three London conventions were something special – landmark events in the history of tattooing, in the same way as Dunstable had been for an earlier generation.

But The Tattoo Collective wasn't trying to be that kind of event. (After all, the London International Tattoo Convention, which is brought to you by the same organisers, is still very much alive and kicking at its Tobacco Dock location.) The Tattoo Collective was a no-nonsense kind of event, in the best possible way. All the artists were from British and Irish studios, and the only entertainment was the tattooing itself – oh, and an art exhibition. There were no post-apocalyptic pin-ups chomping on fire, no angry young men baring their souls through the medium of thrash, and no titivating burlesque dancers baring other things.

So what was the concept? Well the show consisted of just three elements – the tattooists, the art exhibition, and the venue – and each of these offered its own reward to the visitor.

The artist line-up was of course top notch. There isn't space to list all the names here, but these examples will give you an idea of the quality. The prestigious London studios were there in force (Frith Street, Seven Doors, Black Garden, Modern Electric...); the Bath Street Collective had travelled down from Scotland, as had Alex Rattray (Red Hot and Blue), Jason Corbett (Insider Tattoo), the Inkdependent crew and others; Chris Jones of Physical Graffiti, Dave Swambo and Gavin Rose of Stronghold were representing Wales; Chris Crooks (White Dragon) and Craig Kelly (India Street Tattoo) came from Northern Ireland; and from Eire, there was Remis. In total there were around 150 artists present, which is a good size but by no means constitutes a monster show.



1. ryan 'the scientist' smith
2. matt houston, seven doors
3. steve butcher, ship shape
4. chris jones, physical graffiti
5. adriaan machete
6. artist unknown
7. artist unknown



All the artists were in one large hall – a space which, in my opinion, is second to none, with clean white walls, a polished concrete floor and gallons of natural light flooding in through the skylights above. It could have easily been tailor made for the job. I believe those elements really contributed to the relaxed atmosphere within the hall, making it easy to spend time there just wandering around and chatting. The ink flowed as the hours passed and what you see on these pages is just a sample of what was created over the three days of the convention.

The art exhibition was housed in two separate large halls. Many of the contributing artists were working the show and it gave collectors the chance to chat with them before taking the plunge. It was fantastic to see all Joe Harrison and Hanumantra's collaborative portraits together, plus Claudia de Sabe's beautiful Jupiter's Daughters project (and much else besides), but in comparison to the hustle and bustle of the main hall the exhibition seemed empty. Despite the quality and variety of the work on show, and the ambition of the concept, I'm not sure that it was really appreciated. This was by far the largest space given over to an exhibition of tattooists' art that I have ever seen at a convention. It reflected convention organiser Miki Vialletto's passion and his crusade to get tattooists' art more widely recognised. Perhaps a separate lower-priced ticket giving entry only to the exhibition might have enticed the curious art lover to come in for a browse? Just a thought.





- 8. gino angelov, never say die
- 9. steve butcher, ship shape
- 10. gino angelov, never say die!
- 11. alex rattray, red hot and blue
- 12. jairo, kamil tattoos
- 13. rodrigo souto, black garden
- 14. ryan smith, nr studios
- 15. piotrek, good times
- 16. luca ortis, private studio
- 17. dave swambo, stronghold tattoo



18.

The final element contributing to the success of this convention was of course its venue. And the location of the Old Truman Brewery really turbo-charged the whole experience. The crazy frenetic energy of the surrounding area was in stark contrast to the Collective's calm relaxed atmosphere. Stroll out on to Brick Lane and within moments you were swept along into one of London's premier urban bazaars, your senses assaulted by the smells of street food and the sounds of the city – buskers and sirens mixed with the low level buzz of life itself – with street art everywhere you looked, layer upon layer of it, covering anything and everything and making it seem like the buildings would collapse without it. It's no accident that The Tattoo Collective chose to locate itself in such an exciting, inspiring and culturally diverse area. What was happening within the show and what was happening outside it were intrinsically linked. When you bought a ticket for this show – whether it was for the day or the whole weekend – Brick Lane and London's East End were included in the price.

The Tattoo Collective promoted itself with words such as “unique” and “innovative”. I'm not sure it was either of those... but then again I'm not sure it wasn't! At the end of the day the question I'm asking myself is, “Does the UK need another tattoo convention?” The jury's out on that one. But does it need this convention? Yes, definitely.



19.



20.



21.



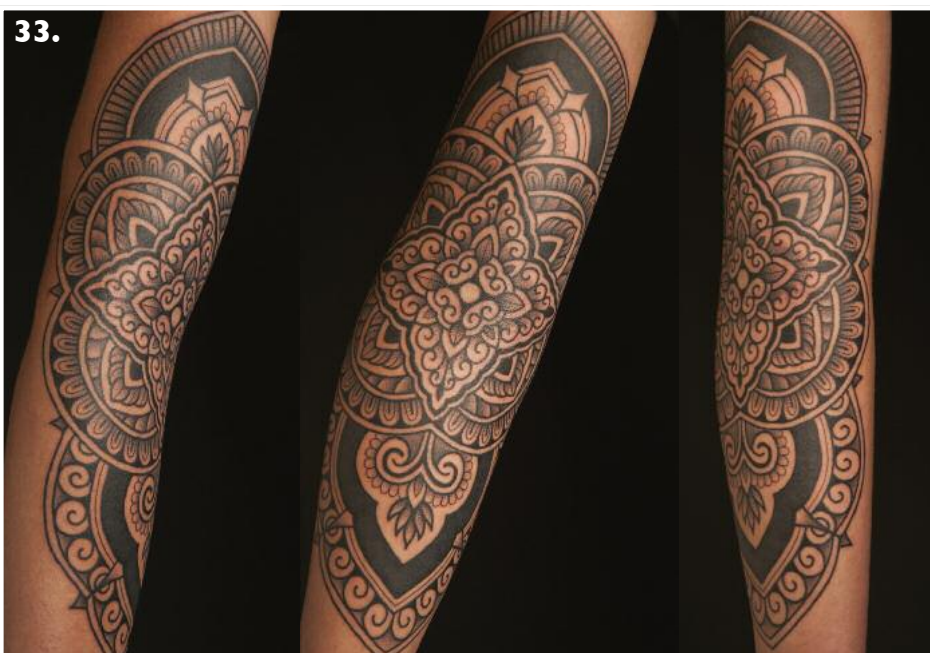
22.



23.

- 18. jordan croke, second skin
- 19. artwork by remis
- 20. justin burnout, ghost house collective
- 21. painting by chris guest
- 22. kali, never say die!
- 23. max pniewski, southmead tattoo
- 24 & 25. hanumantra, un l ty tattoos
- 26. jak connolly
- 27. steve butcher, ship shape





**28-30. rodrigo souto,
black garden tattoo**
**31. sam barber,
sam barber tattoo**
32. luca ortis, private studio
33. jack peppiette, insider tattoo

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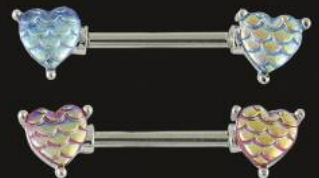


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Steve Herring is an unsung hero of UK tattooing. He's travelled all over the planet spending time with tribal people and building an in-depth understanding of the meanings behind their tattoos – knowledge that he brought to his work at Into You, the London studio (now sadly closed) that was so influential in establishing the modern tribal tattoo style. He quietly educated the more prominent members of the Into You family, preferring to remain very much in the background himself. As he reaches sixty years old, Steve was in reflective mood when we met up recently for a chat.

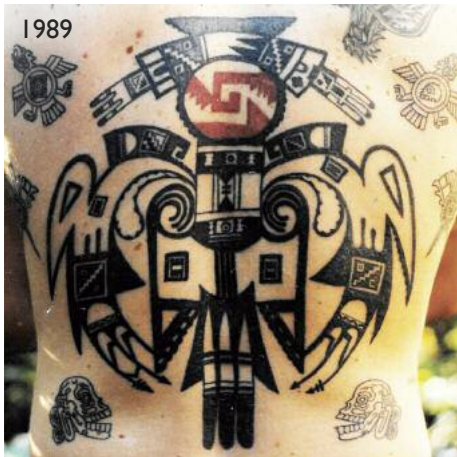
Tell us about your travelling...

Back in the early nineties, before I worked at Into You, I used to spend the winters tattooing in India. That was when the Leu family were there, and Goa was a real hotbed for good quality tattooing. I had the pleasure of meeting and travelling with a lot of tribal people, and I got to tattoo many of them. Between the mid nineties and the early two thousands I travelled in The Gambia and I worked with the Jola, Mandinka and Fula tribes. I tattooed members of the Rabari and the Telugu in India, and I also worked in Malaysia for a while with the Dayak tribes. So many indigenous tribes have become Christianised or Islamised and lost their own culture. That traditional culture is now outlawed, including the tattooing. And nobody wants to do it because it's outlawed. I think that's why so many of the tribal tattoos you see in books are actually half-finished. One Dayak chief I met had a lot of unfinished work, and the local tattooist wouldn't finish it – so when someone volunteered me, and offered my services, he was stoked. He really wanted to keep his identity as a leader of the tribe. I tattooed a traditional crawling crab across his chest, and all up the sides of his ribs – he had tattoos all over his legs too – and at the end of it he told me it was the most painful tattoo he'd had in his life.

Where did you catch the travel bug?

I've always had the travel bug. I remember back in the early eighties we tried to get from England to India going overland, via Greece, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. I spent a lot of time in Turkey. I wasn't tattooing then. That came much later. I was actually trying to avoid a possible prison sentence and decided my best bet was to hit the road! The travel bug for me (and many people of my generation) came from the National Geographic magazine. I used to look at it as a kid. I had piles and piles of them. That magazine made such an impression on so many people. It was so well written, with great respect for the cultures that it represented.





So when did the tattooing begin?

When I started to get tattooed, I realised that tattooing was in a right fucking hole. It was stagnant and going nowhere. Wizards and bubbles... British tattooing was so short sighted! Travelling, and looking at National Geographic magazine, made me realise there was so much more out there... So many other influences... But the guy who was tattooing me didn't really get it. He would look at the designs, but he always did them too small. I could tell he was really cynical and jaded with the job. He kept saying to me, 'Why don't you do it?' – not that he was going to show me anything! He was too old school for that. But he was one of the only people ever to help me. His name was Tony Clifton. He kind of showed me a bit about how the tattoo game worked – customers, shops, etc – but he always held back some crucial bits of information. That's the kind of thing that's been lost from tattooing nowadays. Now, it's too easy. If your machine breaks you just go and buy another one. A lot of the soul of tattooing has been lost. Just because you've been to art school and you can draw, it doesn't mean you can tattoo. There are great tattooers who can't draw. And fashions within tattooing are changing so rapidly. It used to be that a style would stay in for years; now it's weeks! This week – stars. Next week – bum clouds! You can now date a person's tattoo by the fad that was in at the time. And a lot of people are getting tattooed without any knowledge of the cultural importance of the images that they wear...



There's a big difference between respecting the meanings of symbols and their placement, and just plonking them on because they look good...

Yeah, like me finding I have a women's tattoo! But in my experience – from all my travelling – people usually love the fact that you love their imagery. Often it's only the elders of the tribe who really know what the symbols mean, and most of them are dead so the story is slowly getting lost in time. But it's lost anyway because of the westernisation. Everyone is becoming the same. To have a cultural identity is almost frowned upon. It used to be that tattooing was a bond between the outcasts of society. Now tattoos are used as a fashion statement – according to who did them and how much they cost. It's all become very competitive.



Is it a good thing that tattoos are so acceptable these days?

I don't think they *are* all acceptable. Sure, some are – but people still look at me with disgust. I don't understand why people make judgements based on aesthetics.

You were one of the first tattooists to champion the swastika tattoo.

Was that from your trips to India?

Actually no. It was totally an act of provocation. I used to love those bikers with a big red swastika on their shirts. I just found the shape so powerful. And I have always thought you have to do these things... so that people will ask questions in their own minds... but maybe people aren't that clever! Rather than asking themselves 'Why is that person wearing that symbol?' they make ill-informed snap decisions about the person. But ultimately that's their choice. What I like to do is offer them the chance to think. Even if it takes a harsh statement to set the ball rolling



tattooing lucky diamond rich 2004



2004



1997



1996





2007

So you met Alex Binnie and ended up working at Into You...

Yeah, it was back in the mid eighties. I met Alex Binnie at the first London convention at the Hammersmith Palais – before it moved to Dunstable. We weren't like all the others there. We never had big holes cut out of our clothes to show off our tattoos! I worked with Alex when he was in Clerkenwell, and it was there that he told me how to make needles. That was one of the major helps I've had in my career. The other was when Tony Clifton took me to see Micky Sharpz in his Jag, where I bought my first machine and my first transformer, both of which still work... In many ways Into You was a great shop to work in

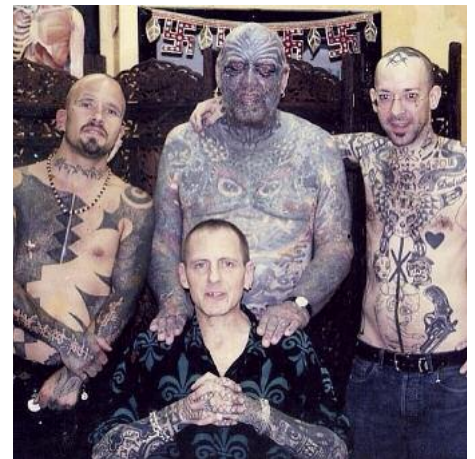
because the clients were generally quite open-minded. Some of them were amazing. But we also used to get lots of arseholes who would come and hang around just because they thought it was cool and trendy.

Do you feel it was one of the shops that changed tattooing?

Yeah, there will never be another Into You. It was a magical time. It was an amazing, inventive and creative time. It had a reputation for drugs and that was part and parcel of the whole thing. Everybody had their thing, their drug of choice. But eventually it had to stop...

During your time at Into You, so many artists established their names through that shop, but somehow you never did...

For me, it was all about confidence. Alex was always on my case about it. I was at the shop longer than most, and I brought in a lot of knowledge that fed the others, but I was never really interested in fame or notoriety. I guess I just slipped through the cracks.



1991



2007



1990



2011



2011

When did you leave Into You?

I didn't leave. I was sacked! But over the 10 years I worked there so was Curly, Dan Gold, Tom Hooper and Xed Le Head, so I was in good company.

So when you left you started your own shop, I Hate Tattoos. How's that going?

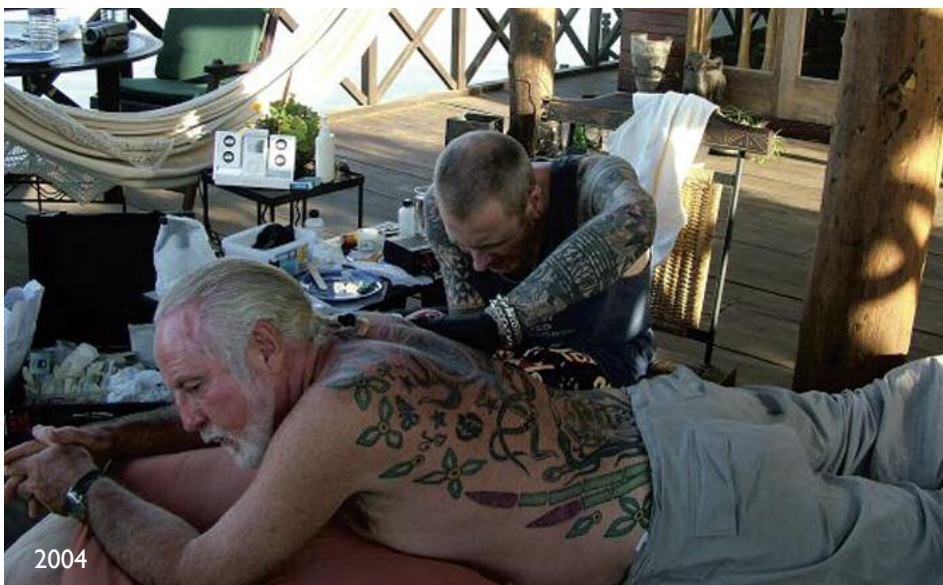
Well for 12 years it was going well, but we've just been closed down under a compulsory purchase order because they're building a railway line through it. Just as we got a good, trustworthy, hard-working team! But we're in the process of opening another shop.

So how do you view the tattoo world as it is now?

It's fucked. And we are all responsible for that. We wanted to be taken seriously. We were so desperate to promote tattooing we gave too much knowledge away to anyone and everyone, and now it's out of control. We had respect for people, but they've let us down. 99% of people are wrong uns.



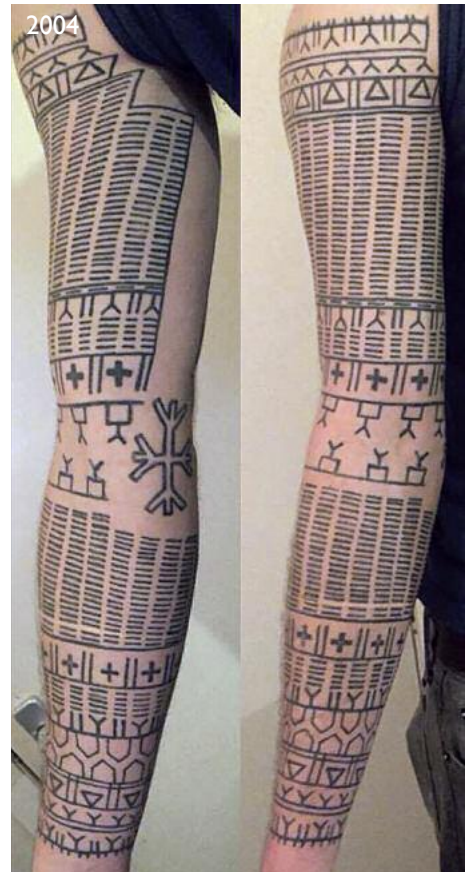
2012



2004



2003



Could we have kept a lid on it? Even with the advent of the internet?

Yeah we could have. But 99% of people are shit and lazy. And if they can get away with it, they do as little as possible. Why do the research when you can simply grab some image that means nothing and slap it on someone who knows nothing!

Where did you find your reference and designs before the internet?

I used to go to museums. I even got locked in once! They must have forgotten I was in there and I was banging on the window yelling 'Let me out!' I used to sit in the library copying tribal designs because there weren't any photocopiers. Eventually you'd end up nicking the books because you couldn't keep going back again and again. And of course if you'd found the book and kept it, then nobody was going to have it and you'd gained an edge over other tattooists! I worked a lot harder than

most to gain the knowledge. If someone came to IntoYou and wanted Celtic, it was always me that got to do it. I had lots of different types of designs – Pictish, Viking, Irish, Scandinavian, and all the African tribal too. And because I had all this information it meant that I could convince people to broaden their minds and have something away from the big black tribal that says nothing to nobody.



Has tattooing lost its language?

Yeah. Most of tattooing is pretty much irrelevant throwaway pretty pictures. We've lost our voice. The messages and symbolism within the artwork can no longer be read, so the meanings become lost.

What is it about tattooing that brings you back to it everyday?

Creativity. As an artist, I need to create. Art is incredible. If you put it on skin, it comes to life. And the confidence you can give a person! It changes people's lives. It happened for me five years ago. I was ready to quit tattooing and I was fed up with where I was – and then I had my face tattooed and suddenly it gave me instant confidence and an identity.

I don't want to sound jaded but over the 30 odd years I've done literally tens of thousands of tattoos and still love what I do, be it a knot of eternity or a dragon back piece, I love tattooing as much as my beautiful wife Karen (Just don't tell her)

I Hate Tattoos

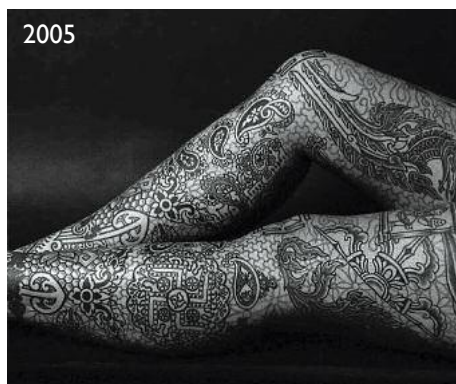
Unit 1
400-404 York Way
London
N7 9LR

Phone: 07956 967537

Instagram: FishBloke 57

www.facebook.com/pg/I-Hate-Tattoos-Tattoo-Studio-181330529486/about/

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TALES FROM THE NAUGHTY STEP

Hello again dear readers. It's your ever-present, effervescent Karma Punk back again with another tale from the naughty step. I'm calling this one Tattoo Will Eat Itself.

Back in the mid-eighties, NME journalist David Quantick predicted that pop would eat itself. Cannibalisation and endless recycling would be its downfall. He suggested that, in theory, the perfect pop song could be created by combining all the best parts of all pre-existing successful songs into one all-conquering track. This was, after all, the era when songwriting and record producing trio Mike Stock, Matt Aitken and Pete Waterman were enjoying mega-success, scoring more than a hundred UK top 40 hits and achieving record sales that soared into the multi-millions. Their apparent production-line output led to them being referred to as the "hit factory", or "Schlock, Aimless and Waterdown", with critics accusing them of churning out songs like fast food: cheap, unwholesome and identical.

Quantick's prophesy has proved to be chillingly accurate. Over the last three decades, pop music has indeed shown its preference for recombining old ideas rather than creating new ones. And all this repetition and regurgitation has led to the current state of the music business – which is, essentially, in the shitter.

And isn't tattooing going in the same direction?

The other week I noticed an identical reference image tattooed on three different clients by three different artists in almost exactly the same way. Look at the portfolios of even the most successful tattooists and you'll often see an almost Stock Aitken Waterman-esque approach to their art – a production line, a 'hit factory'. And while these artists are picking up awards, garnering media coverage, commanding huge fees and fighting

off the sponsors, will they – ultimately – leave behind anything of lasting value? Or are they simply creating mass-market pop?

When the 80s came to an end, so did the market dominance of Stock Aitken and Waterman. They were completely 'of their time' and, as a result, their tunes have not aged well. (In fact the 'hit factory' was recently voted the second worst thing about the 80s, beaten only by Margaret Thatcher and fending off stiff competition from the likes of Chernobyl and the Ethiopian famine.) Compare their output to such releases as The Cocteau Twins' *Treasure*, Kate Bush's *Hounds of Love*, Joy Division's *Closer*, Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs* or Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation*. All of these were released in the 80s but none of them (with the possible exception of *Hounds of Love*) enjoyed anything like the commercial success of a Stock Aitken and Waterman hit. However, they are sublime artistic statements

by truly talented musicians and they will stand the test of time.

Which makes me wonder... how will today's repetitive and unimaginative tattoos figure in the future of tattooing?

So before you get your next tattoo – or before you do your next tattoo – ask yourself, is this just a rehash or is it something truly unique? Is it *When Doves Cry* or another Bananarama hit?

Until next time - Paul
talesfromthenaughtystep@gmail.com



IN FOCUS

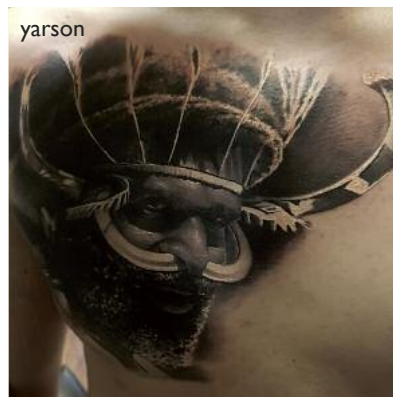
In these pages we showcase a small selection of work from a group of artists working together. This month:

Yarson Tattoo Studio, 508 George St, Aberdeen AB25 3XJ

Tel 01224 639977 • www.yarsontattooostudio.com

To have your studio featured, please send examples to:

In Focus, Total Tattoo Magazine, 111 Furze Road, Norwich, NR7 0AU, UK





simon



yarson



simon



yarson



yarson



yarson



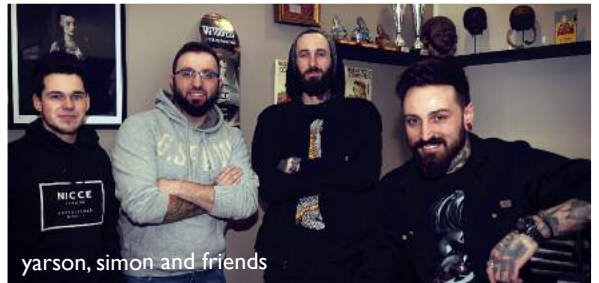
yarson



simon



yarson



yarson, simon and friends



yarson

CONVENTION CALENDAR

UK CONVENTIONS

April 9th

Ink n Iron

The New Bingley Hall, 1 Hockley Circus
Birmingham, West Midlands. B18 5PP
inkandiron.co.uk

April 14th-16th

Tattoo Extravaganza Portsmouth

Pyramids Centre, Southsea Seafront
www.tattooextravaganza.co.uk

April 15th-16th

Maidstone Tattoo Extravaganza

Kent Showground, Detling, Kent
www.maidstonetattooextravaganza.co.uk

April 22-23rd

Tattoo Art Expo Cork

Silver Springs, Clayton Silver Springs Hotel,
Cork

April 29th-30th

Lincs Ink

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

April 29th-30th

The Big North Tattoo Show

Metro Radio Arena, Newcastle Upon Tyne
www.bignorthtattooshow.co.uk

May 5th-7th

10th Liverpool Tattoo Convention

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

May 13th-14th

10th Brighton Tattoo Convention

The Brighton Centre, 10A Fleet St
Brighton, East Sussex BN1 2GR
brightontattoo.com

May 20-21st

Northern Ireland Tattoo Convention

Belfast Waterfront, 2 Lanyon Pl
Belfast BT1 3WH
nitattoo.com

May 27th-28th

Scarborough Tattoo Show

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

June 10th-11th

Northampton Tattoo Convention

Northampton Saints Rugby Football Club

Franklin's Gardens, Weedon Rd,
Northampton NN5 5BG,
www.northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com

June 10th-11th

Bristol Tattoo Convention
Brunel's Old Station, The Passenger Shed,
Station Approach, Bristol BS1 6QH,
www.bristoltattooconvention.com

June 24th-25th

York International Tattoo Convention

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

July 1st-2nd July

Cirque du Tattoo Festival

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

July 1st-2nd

Southampton Tattoo Festival

The Ageas Bowl, Botley Road
Southampton, Hampshire SO30 3XH
www.southamptontattoofestival.co.uk

July 8th-9th

Leeds Tattoo Expo

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

July 8th-9th

Powys Charity Tattoo Convention

Community Centre, Mount Lane
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6EZ
www.powystattooconvention.co.uk

July 14th-16th

Titanic Tattoo Convention

Titanic Building Belfast, 1 Queens Rd, Titanic
Quarter, Belfast BT3 9EP,
www.facebook.com/titanic.tattooconventionbelfast

July 29th-30th

Portsmouth International Tattoo Convention

Portsmouth Guildhall, Guildhall Square,
Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 2AB,
www.portsmouthtattooconvention.co

August 4th-6th

Dublin International Tattoo Convention

Dublin Convention Centre, Spencer Dock
N Wall Quay, Dublin 1
www.dublintattooconvention.com

August 18th-20th

Blackpool Tatcon

Norbreck Castle Hotel, Queen's Promenade
Blackpool, Lancashire FY2 9AA
www.tatconblackpool.co.uk

August 26th-27th

Cornwall Tattoo Convention

Falmouth University, Penryn Campus, Treliever
Road, Penryn TR10 9FE,
cornwalltattooconvention.co.uk

September 22nd-24th

The International London Tattoo Convention

Tobacco Dock, 50 Porters Walk
London E1W 2SF
www.thelondontattooconvention.com

October 29th-1st

Midlands Tattoo Industry Show

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

OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

April 7th-9th

Ink Days Zurich

Mövenpick Hotel Zürich-Regensdorf
Im Zentrum 2, 8105 Regensdorf. Switzerland
www.ink-days.ch

May 5th-7th

International Tattoo Expo Roma

Palazzo dei Congressi, Piazza John Fitzgerald
Kennedy, 1, Roma. Italy
www.internationaltattooexporoma.com

May 17th-24th May

Traditional Tattoo and World Culture Festival

Recinto Ferial El Molino de Calvia
Ctra. Santa Ponça-Calvià, 07183 Galatzo, Illes
Balears, Spain
www.traditionaltattoofestival.com

26th-28th May 2017-

Amsterdam Tattoo Convention

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

July 14th-16th

Empire State Tattoo Expo

1335 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY
10019, United States

August 4th-6th

Berlin Tattoo Convention

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

November 10th-12th

Brussels International Tattoo Convention

Tour & Taxis, Avenue du Port 86,
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.brusselstattooconvention.be

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