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An underwater scene filled with various pieces of plastic waste, including bags, bottles, and fragments, floating in blue water. In the bottom left corner, a large, detailed fish is swimming towards the right. The overall tone is somber and environmental.

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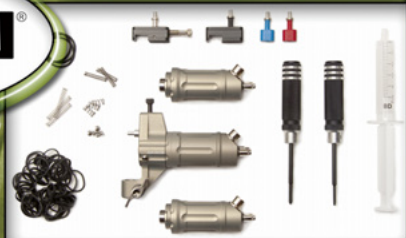


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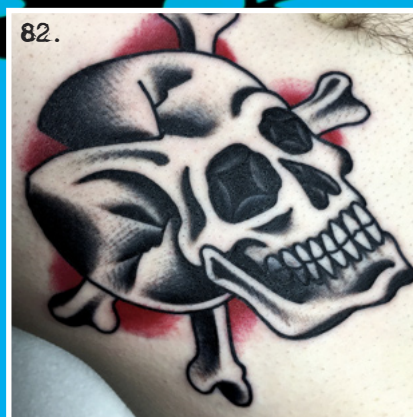
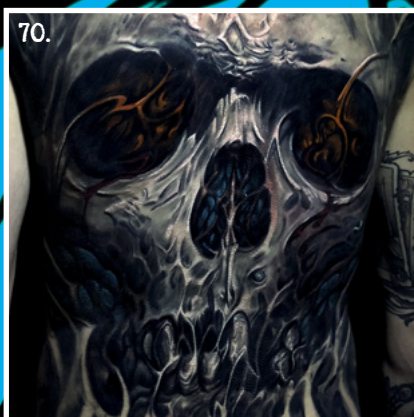
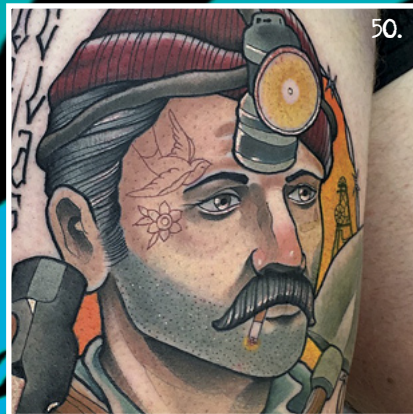
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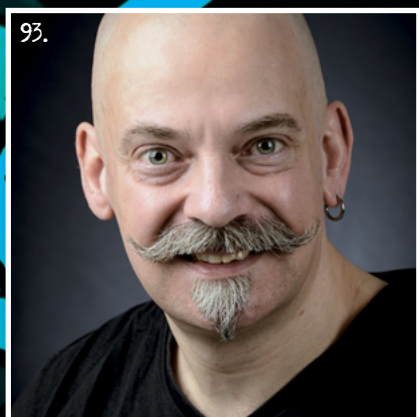
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Cover Model: Shelly D'Inferno
Photographer: Jenna Kraczek

Editorial team

Perry Rule, Lizzy Guy
Jill Feldt

Editorial enquiries

editor@totaltattoo.co.uk

Advertising enquiries

advertising@totaltattoo.co.uk

Gallery submissions

gallery@totaltattoo.co.uk

Subscription enquiries

subs@totaltattoo.co.uk

Social Media

Instagram: @totaltattoo

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Contributors

Dirk-Boris Rödel

Jenna Kraczek

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WELCOME to 169

As a young and clueless adolescent, I discovered music, latched on to an identity and stuck with it. I was a punk. You couldn't stop me. I had all the knowledge of every record label and every band that existed and I was destined to be the most 'punk' in my class (which, in an all-girls school in rural Lincolnshire was easier than I thought). I bet you were very similar, whether it was music, books, films or something else...

This has always been the way, and always will be. Think back to the Teddy Boys, Goths, Emos... at some point they will all have been young people who will have said to their parents, "You just don't understand, this is who I am!" This networking is an important part of growing up; a lot of people stay in their social groups and their labels become a way of life. But once you are part of a sub-culture, heaven forbid you should actually stray away from its unspoken boundaries. I mean, could you imagine a Trekkie saying to their mates, "I really like Jar Jar Binks" (to be fair, could you imagine anyone saying that?)

I totally understand the celebration of certain identity labels. The fact that LGBTQ+ people, for instance, can now stand up and be openly proud of who they are is a wonderful thing. Another great example is the body positivity movement, where people are now reclaiming the negative words that have caused so much harm in the past. However, when 'celebrating an identity' turns into 'pigeon-holing' or even stereotyping, it doesn't feel so good.

See that picture of me, at the bottom? It's from 2016. If you've seen me since, you'll know that I've actually got a Chelsea cut hairstyle now. This is a hairstyle that emerged in the 70s punk scene and was made popular by Rude Girls who were into ska music and scooters. To an extent, that's me (apart from scooters - I drive a Nissan Micra!) but it's not the *whole* of me and I don't want to feel judged if I don't conform to the stereotype communicated by my haircut!

Tattooed people are no longer labelled and stereotyped in the ways they used to be. But are tattoo artists backing themselves into a corner by over-specialising and too-rigidly labelling their personal styles of work? I mean, how do you bring colour into your ideas when you've spent the last five years making a noise about black work? Or if you've hashtagged the hell out of #boldwillhold, what happens when you remove the thick lines for soft realism? I know of some tattooists who have tried to move away from a style, only to find that they're in too much demand for it! Some even resort to setting up two separate tattooing profiles on social media so that they can scratch those creative itches.

In a world where so many things have to be categorised, do we really need to create more labels - when all this does is box us in?



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

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

GUEN DOUGLAS PHONE CASES

British / French Canadian tattoo artist Guen Douglas has designed some awesome phone cases for RhinoShield. Check them out here: rhinoshield.de/collections/artist-guen-solid-suit Guen is currently based in Berlin, and her colourful illustrative style has solid traditional roots.



BACK TO SCHOOL

Lowbrow Tattoo in Sebring, Ohio, had the welfare of local school children at heart with its recent charity initiative. The shop was asking its customers to donate backpacks and other useful school-related items in exchange for substantial discounts on their tattoos. And of course even if people didn't want to get a tattoo they were still welcome to donate! Lowbrow Tattoo's owners, Bob and Sara McElroy have always tried to make theirs a family-oriented shop, with a friendly atmosphere and close links to the community, and they love doing charity events. The idea for the backpack drive came from tattooist Jeremy Steiner (who works at Lowbrow), who'd seen it work well in other places. Everyone involved said it was great to be able to provide local children with the school essentials that they would otherwise be unable to afford.



ROBERTO ON THE MOVE

Tattooist Roberto Poliri is excited to announce that as of 6th October he will be a full-time artist at Black Cobra Tattoo in Glasgow, working alongside Darryl Mullen. The shop is located at 15 N Gower Street, Glasgow, G51 1PW.



LIVING PURE NATURAL

We've been given ten pots of Living Pure Natural's Tattoo Expert Aftercare Balm for ten lucky readers to win!

Living Pure Natural tell us it's a gentle product made from 100% natural ingredients and it's free from parabens, petroleum, lanolin and animal products. It's suitable for all skin types and it absorbs easily into the skin without clogging pores. According to the Living Pure Natural website, it can be used to soften the skin pre-tattooing as well as helping to heal and soothe new tattoos, and because of its hydrating properties it can even revive old tattoos.

To be in with a chance of winning your free pot of balm, all you need to do is complete the following sentence with the correct word:

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- a) Pores
- b) Bores
- c) Jim Morrison from The Doors"

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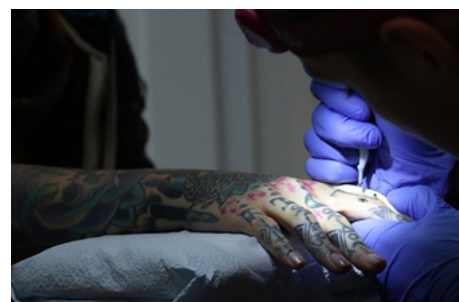
The 'Salon du Tatouage' in Lanvollon, France, recently held a flash event in support of DID'22, a local charity for insulin-dependent children and young people with diabetes in the Côtes-d'Armor area (www.asso-diabete-ajd.fr/22). Small tattoos such as hearts, anchors and stars were on offer for 50 Euros, with 30 Euros of that going to the charity. As well as tattooing, there were motorbikes on display and food and drink on sale. Funds were being raised towards the purchase of monitoring equipment that will reduce the need for children to have such frequent blood tests, which they often find upsetting.



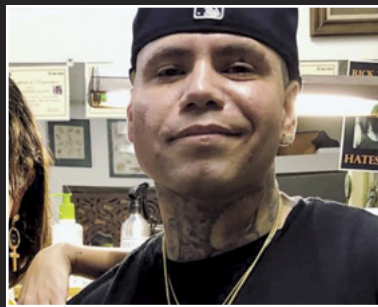
QUEER TATTOO SHOP OPENS

In Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada), a new tattoo studio is scheduled to open this month that will cater specifically to the needs of the LGBT community and provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all LGBT people. Owner and tattooist Gabe David (known as squigglyqualor on Instagram) describes Outlaw Country Tattoo as a "queer tattoo shop where we can set our own rules." For LGBT people, visiting a tattoo shop can be a challenging experience in ways that others might not be aware of – where, for example, the use of inappropriate gender-specific pronouns (he, she, etc) or even an apparent insensitivity to a customer's feelings of vulnerability when clothing is removed can easily create a problematic situation. Gabe's

goal is for Outlaw Country Tattoo to be a comfortable and safe space where respect is at the top of the agenda and where people can learn about each other's differences, talk openly about issues such as discrimination, and celebrate the reclaiming of their bodies with tattoos.



ISAIAH 'BOO BOO' NEGRETE, R.I.P.



News has reached us of the sad passing of Isaiah 'Boo Boo' Negrete, fine line tattoo artist at Shamrock Social Club Tattoo in Hollywood, California. He worked with his father, Freddy Negrete and developed his skills from a very early age. Boo Boo was a loved and respected personality on the Los Angeles tattoo scene; he was a beautiful person who produced beautiful work. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and tattoo colleagues. See his work at www.instagram.com/booboonegrete

TOPPLING DOMINOES

Our news radar has picked up a fun story from Russia, where we hear that a branch of Domino's Pizza apparently promised 100 free pizzas to every customer who got a tattoo of the Domino's logo... According to various press reports, they had to retract their overly generous initial offer and swiftly restrict the deal to the first few hundred people who replied, otherwise they could have put themselves out of business, such was the overwhelming response! In issuing the revised terms of the offer they did, however, thoughtfully include anybody who happened to be in a tattoo studio having their Domino's tattoo done at that very moment, saying all they had to do was get a photo of the new tattoo to Domino's by noon that day.

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FEELING TIGHT

Some late news that came in just as we were going to print. Tights brand Wolford has collaborated with five female tattoo artists to produce subtle yet eye-catching designs on a range of tights in their Autumn/Winter 2019 collection. And we hear there are live pop-up launch events going on in those tattooists' home cities – London, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Milan. Check out www.wolfordshop.co.uk/search?q=ink&lang=en_G for product details.



SCUM BAGS RECORD SALES, BUT...

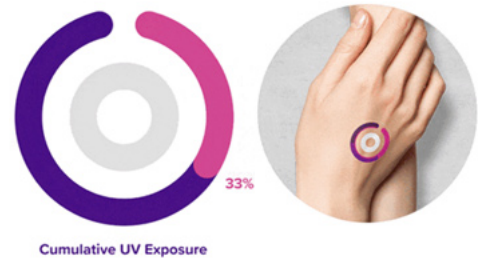


The multiplayer survival game Scum, billed as having unprecedented levels of character customisation, sold in record numbers during the first 24 hours of its early access launch last month. However, vigilant players in the gaming community noticed that one of the characters seemed to be wearing Nazi and neo-Nazi tattoos. Publisher Devolver Digital immediately asked the developers at Gamepires to edit out the offensive images (which, according to press reports, had been mistakenly incorporated in order to give an authentic dimension to the character). Scum has received huge critical acclaim. The game's full release is planned for 2019.

TIME IN THE SUN

An interesting Kickstarter campaign is well on the way to achieving (and exceeding!) its fundraising goal – which means the world may soon see some extremely useful programmable 'tattoos' coming on to the market. San Francisco company LogicInk have already developed a skin mounted sensor that monitors daily exposure to the sun's potentially harmful UV rays (**check out [logicink.com](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1646994926/logicink/description)**) and they sought backing to ramp up production of that product as well as developing other exciting innovations. Ideas on the table include a hydration monitor, a pollution exposure indicator, dynamic feedback about nicotine or caffeine levels in the body, and a blood alcohol sensor (and yes, they tell us, someone did have to get drunk for research purposes). These are not electronic devices. Changes in the body and its environment are measured biochemically and are indicated purely and simply by changes in the appearance of the 'tattoo'. Read the full details at

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1646994926/logicink/description>



NIORKZ ON THE MOVE

Tattooist Niorkz who was featured in last month's Total Tattoo magazine has now moved to Horizon Tattoo Co. and can be found at 2 Land of Green Ginger, Hull HU1 2EA. Check his IG @niorkz for details and appointments

TATTOOED CHILDREN IN NYC

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) in New York City protects and promotes the safety and well-being of children and families – by providing child welfare, juvenile justice, and early care and education services. And now they've announced an important new pilot scheme: free tattoo removal for any child or young person who has been trafficked or involved in a gang.

Gangland and prostitution-related tattoos (such as dollar signs on their faces or pimps' names on their torsos) make it difficult for the young people affected to move on from their traumatic experiences; for many, the removal of these tattoos will be an essential part of the healing process. With the NYC Child Tattoo Eradication Project, ACS is partnering with medical providers who will offer their services on a pro-bono basis. "No young person should be forced to go through life with a permanent mark of exploitation and abuse on their body," said ACS Commissioner David Hansell. "We are thankful to the committed medical professionals who have offered [their] services to help some of the most vulnerable children in New York City."

"Sex trafficking victims and reformed gang members should be able to move forward with their lives, and not be constantly reminded of past traumas," said City Council Member Rory I. Lancman. "Empowering these individuals to have old tattoos removed, at no cost, will help them reclaim their identity and build a brighter future."

Read the full details here:

www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2018/Aug202018.pdf

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Luke Atkinson could be described as 'the British ambassador for Japanese tattooing in Germany'. He's been around for a long time and he learnt his trade from some of the very best artists in the world. He doesn't post much on social media and he doesn't do a hell of a lot to promote his studio (Checker Demon in Stuttgart) so there are a lot of younger artists who may not have even heard of him. But if you don't, you certainly should!

Words: Dirk-Boris
Photos: Luke Atkinson



LUKE ATKINSON



Born in London in 1965, Luke grew up in Cheltenham. That's where he spent his teenage years and where he discovered punk. "We had a lot of fun," he tells me, laughing. "I couldn't wait to leave school and colour my hair. That was when I first started to get interested in tattooing. It all began with two books I bought - 'The Japanese Tattoo' by Donald Richie and then 'Skin Show' by Chris Wroblewski."

Of course things were very different back then, and there weren't dozens of tattoo shops everywhere. "There wasn't a tattoo shop in Cheltenham. You'd have to get the bus to Gloucester," Luke continues. "A few of my mates borrowed their brother's driving license to go there by car. The shop was in a really seedy part of town and you'd be really scared. The tattoos were cheap, so it wasn't about the money. It was more about whether you had the balls to go in and do it!"





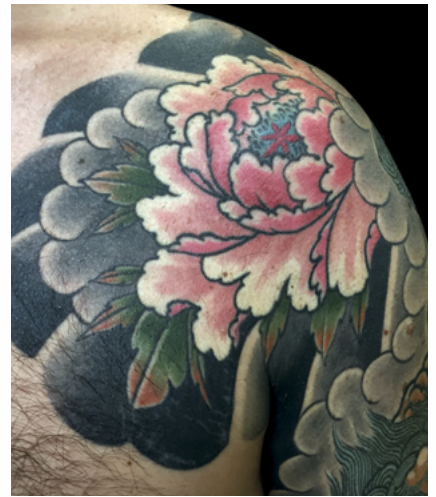
painting of Luke by Shawn Barber

"Some of my friends also tried tattooing themselves with the good old three needles," Luke continues. "So I had a go too. I tattooed a few mates with a homemade kit but I knew that wasn't really how I wanted to do it long term. I needed to find out how to do it properly, where to get a machine, and where to learn. You couldn't watch tattooists work in those days. You'd be told to fuck off."

Luke's father was living in New York at the time, and Luke went there now and then to visit him. Even though he wasn't yet old enough to get tattooed, he'd always be on the look-out for tattoo books, tattoo studios, and any information he could get his hands on. "There was Mike Bakaty, and Thom de Vita on the Lower East Side. And of

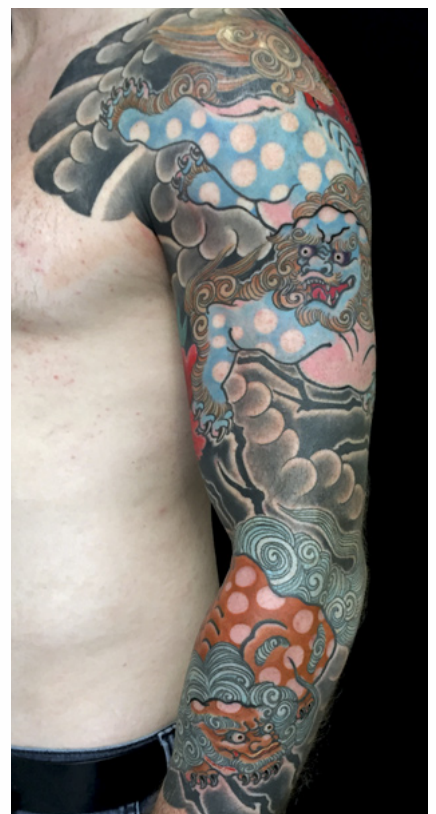
course Spider Webb too, but I didn't get to meet him until a few years later. I studied the work of people like Bob Roberts, Greg Irons and Ed Hardy in the few magazines that were available at that time."

"I was still in my teens when I first came to Germany. I was offered a job painting porcelain in a factory near Cologne. I worked there for a couple of weeks to begin with, then came back again at busy periods such as the lead-up to Christmas. I did that for a couple of years. I hung out with a lot of punks, skinheads, musicians and artists in an old chocolate factory. The guys knew I was into tattooing, and one day we built a tattoo machine from a bent spoon and the motor of a tape recorder. Everybody



wanted a tattoo, but nobody could really draw. It was as new to me as it was to them, but they all decided I was the one with the steadiest hand... So I just drew something on with a ballpoint pen. When I started, though, there was ink everywhere. Then I wiped it once and the design was gone. It was the ultimate nightmare!"

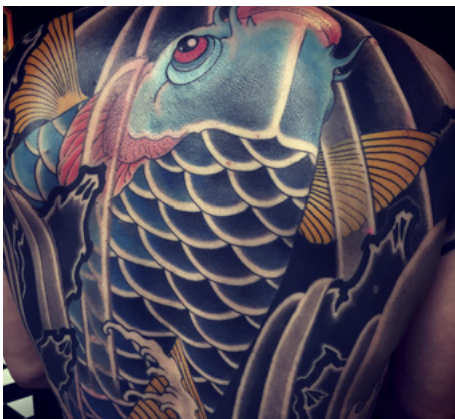
After a while, Luke upgraded to a Spaulding & Rogers kit, but it didn't make things any easier. "I didn't have a clue. It was just one big question mark after another. I tried going to some tattoo shops to find out what I should be doing, but I was just told to fuck off again and again. It was like hitting a brick wall. But I guess that just made my desire even stronger."





Things changed for the better when the brother of a friend got involved in making a television documentary about tattooing. This was the early 80s and tattoo shops at that time were fairly intimidating places, so Luke offered to take him round and introduce him to some tattooists. He took the film crew to Dieter Zalisz's Elektrische Tätowierungen shop in Cologne. "After I'd introduced everybody, Dieter was like, 'I'll be with you guys in a minute, but you, come with me out the back. I wanna talk to you!', and I thought, oh shit, I'm going to get punched in the face... but actually, he asked me if I wanted to work at his place! I couldn't believe what was happening!" That encounter with Dieter in 1984 was the key that unlocked all the doors. "He was very well connected in the tattoo world," Luke tells me. "He knew many of the big names. He'd been to America, and he had tattoos from some amazing people."

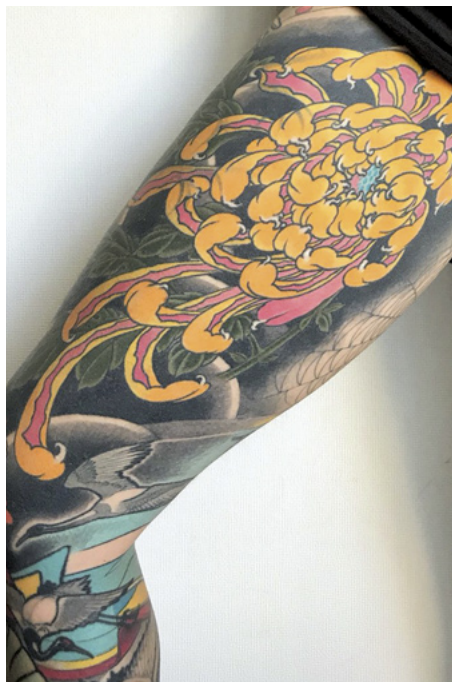
Luke then went to Amsterdam to see if he could work with the famous Henk Schiffmacher (aka Hanky Panky), but yet again he was told to fuck off. Henk did however add the magic words, "Travel the world and then give me a call" - so that's exactly what Luke did. It was the start of an epic seven-year journey.





Mark Mahone, Bill Salmon, Filip Leu and Luke

Luke went to his first tattoo convention in America in 1986. "It was the National Tattoo Convention in New Orleans, and I met Bill Salmon, Ed Hardy, Filip Leu, Jack Rudy, Kari Barba, Paul Jeffries, Mark Mahoney, Paul Rogers and so many others... The crème de la crème. I even met Philadelphia Eddie and Colonel Todd. All of them were very welcoming because the whole idea of the convention was for people to get together. So a very short time after starting to work at Dieter's place, even more doors flew open for me! Suddenly there I was hanging out with all these incredible people, and learning from them. Everyone was so supportive. I got along really well with Filip Leu right from the start and I've spent many a magic moment working with him over the years."





Richard Pinch, Filip Leu and Luke at Good Luck Irons



Luke studied machine building with Micky Sharpz in England for a while, then spent a few adventurous months working 'underground' with Shotsie Gorman in New York (visiting various tattoo conventions along the way). Then in 1988, he decided it was time to make another of his dreams come true and go to Japan. A Japanese book publisher he'd met in Florida helped set up meetings for him with various tattooists. "I was on a journey that just wasn't going to stop!" Luke tells me. "I was so blessed."

A couple of months into his Japanese stay, Luke met Horiyoshi III. "I'd actually written to him when I was a teenager, and even received a letter back, with photos. But now, meeting the legend in person... It was mind-blowing. Seeing him work in his tiny studio, which is stuffed with all kinds of things, and then being invited to go with him to his favourite bar, where we ended up eating and drinking until the early hours... It was the



beginning of something very special. I can't believe it was more than thirty years ago!" Luke went to Horiyoshi's place two or three times a week – watching him work, looking at his books, and getting to know his family. He learnt about the Japanese way of life, and the Japanese way of tattooing. All the while though, he was very aware that he himself was a 'gaijin', a foreigner. "But I think Horiyoshi liked that," he continues. "I never ever wanted to be a member of the Horiyoshi Family, or become his official apprentice. I wasn't pretending to be Japanese; I was simply visiting. I would make mistakes, for which I'd apologise. And I'd always tell Horiyoshi if I visited other tattoo artists. That wasn't really welcome, but it was respected. Horiyoshi became a kind of godfather figure for me, and what he gave to me I have tried to give back by accompanying him on European trips and taking him to conventions – and exploring London's antique shops with him!" From Japan, Luke went on to Thailand then he went to see Henk in Amsterdam again. "I said to him, 'I've done my round-the-world trip. Can I work here now?' and Henk was like, 'Yeah, no problem.' So I spent a whole summer there. He's another of my godfathers in tattooing."



All in all, Luke spent several years working and studying with Horiyoshi III and other Japanese artists, in between various stints at studios in America and Canada (with Bill Salmon at Diamond Club, Terry Tweed at Picture Machine, Paul Jeffries at Smilin' Buddha, and the Dutchman in Vancouver). Then in 1992 he began thinking about setting up his own place. He'd considered Bristol as a location, but in those days opening up a new studio near to an existing business just wasn't done – out of respect – so that ruled it out. "I was toying with the idea of going back to Japan for a while when I received a phone call from Barbara Schirmer, the wife of Toby Schirmer, a tattooist in Stuttgart. She told me Toby had recently passed away, and she was looking for someone to run the shop. Apparently several people, including Dieter Zaliz, had recommended me."

Luke accepted Barbara Schirmer's offer. "I think she was really relieved," he tells me, "because I knew how tattoo shops worked, plus I spoke a bit of German – although the Swabian dialect was a bit of a tongue-twister. The shop was really busy, and nobody seemed to mind that there was this new English guy. I could easily have done thirty tattoos a day; on Saturdays there were like ten people waiting outside before I'd even opened up." The studio was a walk-in shop at that time, with flash on the walls, but Luke had a different approach in mind. "I told Barbara I'd like to turn it into a custom shop with a more personal approach to people's ideas." This was revolutionary. Custom studios simply didn't exist in Germany at the time. "I wanted to draw individual designs for the clients," Luke continues. "I'd seen shops like that in Japan and North America. I really wanted to give it a try, and offer people something different." And that was how Checker Demon became the world-class studio that it is today.



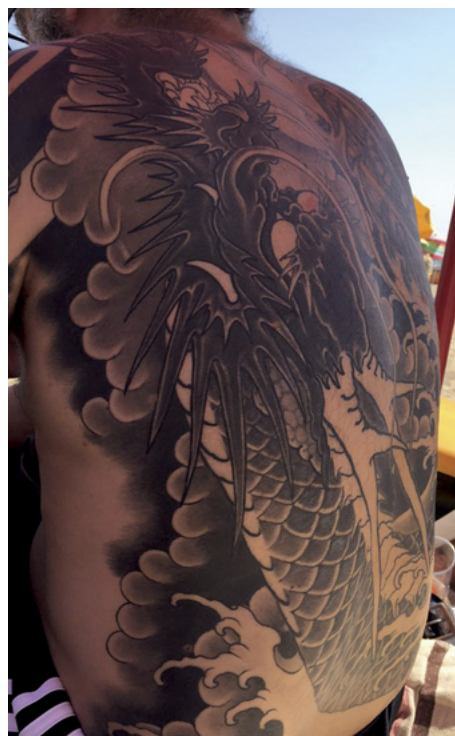
Luke is best known for his Japanese work, but he's always had an open mind when it comes to customers' choices and he's got nothing against a bit of tribal or lettering. He's never been one to judge. "Filip Leu's first tattoo was a fucking star, after all!" he says, laughing. "Everybody has to start somewhere. I just think it's a tattooist's responsibility to show people what's possible, and maybe help point them towards a more individual design."

I ask Luke what it is about Japanese that so fascinates him. Isn't it a bit tedious doing dragons, koi and Hannya masks over and over again? "I do a tiger every now and then too!" he counters, with a smile. "But no," he continues, "it never gets boring. As soon as I've finished one dragon, I'm already thinking about how I'm going to do the next one and how I'm going to make it that little bit better. And Japanese work definitely holds up better than anything else. I don't mind traditional stuff. I can enjoy realism too, if it's really well done. I'm not sure about colour realism though. If it doesn't have black lines, or a lot of black in it, then it's going to look like a pizza in ten years' time. Geometric black work, and mandalas - yes, these work. If they're beautifully positioned on the body, they're true art. This is definitely a style that looks amazing - but tattooing it, I'd go fucking bananas! I guess it's like meditation, and you have to switch off. Then there's the comic stuff, which I don't have a problem with at all. As for biomech, I don't want to turn people into robots. That's really not my cup of tea. I always imagine them around the age of 70 with their grandchildren at the swimming pool! So in the end, Asian imagery is much more attractive to me than any of the Western styles. Maybe that's because of those books that I got hold of at such an early age!"



With a personal tattoo history stretching back four decades, Luke has been at the top of his game for some twenty years now. How has he maintained this? What's the secret of his success? "It's not a conscious thing. I'm just very self-critical, and I love tattooing. I still enjoy spending time with customers, and I love it that they allow me to do what I do. But I'm not the workaholic I used to be. I mean, I have a family - but that just makes the tattoo time even more precious. There's a balance. I don't have any goals except to be happy with what I'm doing. I once saw a sign in San Francisco that said SUCCESS IS THE TRIP, NOT THE DESTINATION and I always keep that message very much in mind."

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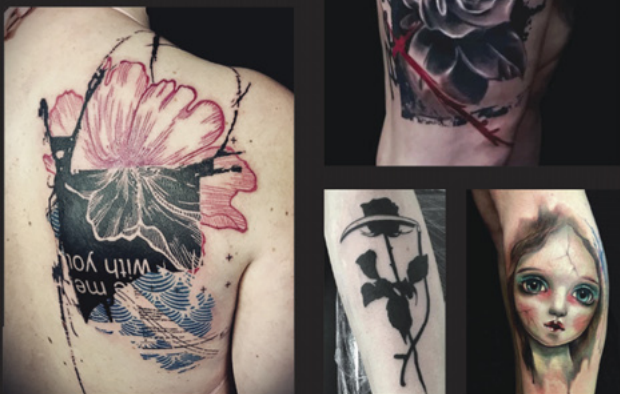
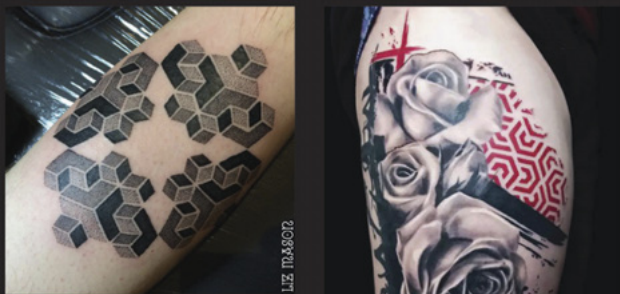
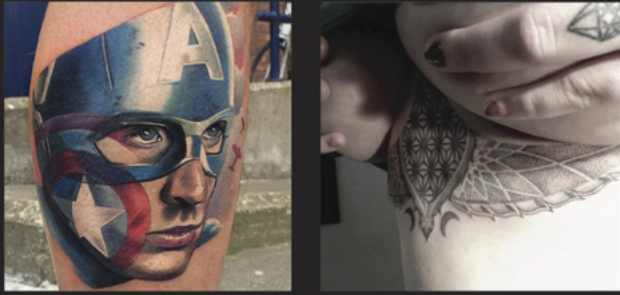
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Words and Pictures by Perry
This Photo by Joe Hill

tattoo extreme's Shanghai tattoo & expo

Sometimes an opportunity comes along that you just can't turn down. When my good friend Dirk-Boris from Tatöwier Magazine got in touch and asked if I would be prepared to travel to China to be a judge at the Shanghai 2018 Tattoo Extreme & Body Art Expo, I was naturally very happy to oblige.





My sense of anticipation and excitement grew over the months leading up to the convention, but eventually the day arrived and a 4am start saw me heading for Heathrow. I flew to Moscow first, then after a short stopover it was on to China.

And suddenly there I was in Shanghai, taking in a view of amazingly tall silver buildings and wide sweeping motorways flowing into the city centre. Cranes and skyscrapers kissed the clouds and the exponential development of this giant Communist power was everywhere to see; building sites pepper the landscape as the economy continues to grow ever upward. Identical twenty-five storey residential blocks stand side-by-side, each apartment displaying a box containing an essential air conditioning unit. The heat was around thirty centigrade and it was really humid. We were staying on the sixteenth floor of the Sunrise Hotel overlooking the Huangpu river that runs through the centre of Shanghai.

Once in my room, I fell asleep almost immediately. I awoke three hours later to be confronted by the incredible sight of Shanghai at night! The huge buildings had come to life with animated illuminations, and where there had been silver windows there were now millions of neon lights; beautiful swirling graphics and laser displays filled the dark night sky. After a quick walk around The Bund (the waterfront, one of the more touristy areas), it was back to the hotel to grab some much-needed sleep.

Friday morning and a coach arrived to ferry us to the convention, which was situated within the fashion area. The venue consisted of four adjoining halls under one roof, with the largest of them playing host to the ninety or so tattooists' booths. As you entered through the double doors, you encountered a large exhibition of figurative paintings that provided a perfect backdrop for many tattoo photos over the weekend. Also in this first room was a wonderful exhibition of delicate silver and gold creations based on Chinese folklore that was really something to behold. The final section of the room was used to promote the TDL tattoo school where you can pay 20,000 yuan (roughly £2,500) for a year's course that includes seminars from the likes of Jess Yen and our very own Bez from Triplesix, and other world class artists.

The line-up of artists at the convention was truly international, with tattooists from Taiwan, Brazil, America and the UK rubbing shoulders with some of China's finest. Conventions here are very much about the competitions, and



jiandong tattoo



layhoo,
hou tattoo



andy schu



paintings on the
silk road



inky joe tattooing

xiaohui chen, inkpower tattoo



large finished pieces are presented for the judges to study and scrutinise. Over the weekend much conversation took place regarding the incredibly high standard of the work on show. Was it the soft, subtle skin or the mastery of the technique that made the grey shades flow so beautifully? We never did quite decide. Andy Shou (Fright Tattoo, Ningbo), Wu Shang (Wu Shang Tattoo, Wenling), Dong Dong (Mummy Tattoo) and Xuan Zhen Tattoo were just a few of the Chinese masters who were there, alongside Taiwan masters Yang (East Tattoo), Diao Zuo (Chen Wei Zuo Tattoo) and many others. Ivana Belakova had travelled from Los Angeles, and from Brazil came Clayton Dias, Sergio Rodrigues, Verani Fontana and Reinaldo Franja. To be honest, there was not a weak link in the chain. Every artist was top drawer and it showed in the competitions.

Saturday started with a slight hiccup. Some people had left the building on Friday displaying their tattoos and wearing nothing but a fundoshi (Japanese undergarment). They were then photographed and the images were put onto social media... causing the authorities to step in and threaten the show with closure. It is easy to forget that China is still a Communist country and that strict rules are in place regarding the public display of tattoos. After much negotiating, organiser Roxanne from Tattoo Extreme magazine manage to win over the authorities and the rest of the weekend went ahead uninterrupted.

**lona yan
chihun liu
shanghai**



ling tattoo



ling tattoo



yu tattoo



ges tattoo studio

On Saturday, there were no competitions and the stage was handed over to art performances and painting exhibitions. On Sunday, competitions were very much back on the agenda, and it seemed that every thirty minutes we were being called back to the stage to admire yet more incredible work. Modern tattooing has only really been present in China for the last eighteen years and in that time the advances that this one nation has made are nothing short of miraculous. With masters training students within their own studios, and the high level of formal education, it is plain to see that this organised and structured approach is a very positive way for tattooing to develop. I have now seen it in both China and India, and both countries are really beginning to shine on the international stage.



jungong, ciging



paintings on the silk road



calligraphy performance



jing hai, leishi tattoo



lamo, owl tattoo



reinaldo silva, good vibe tattoo

inkpower tattoo



**dong dong,
mummy tattoo**



As the show drew to a close we were invited to visit studios in Shanghai - where we treated to some very fine dining indeed. From then on, every morning we were escorted to studio after studio, where we were fed and entertained before moving on to the next. The hospitality and generosity shown to us throughout our entire trip was nothing short of amazing and I would like to thank everyone involved. If you ever get the chance to visit the Shanghai convention I really can't recommend it highly enough. A big big thanks to Roxanne and Harber for organising such a great show and all the artists who hosted us during our time in China.



**fang xiang,
shanghai schuimu tattoo**



rinuciyu, heshang



reinaldo silva working



juzhou tattoo



inky joe, 5 keys



ivana,
ivana tattoo



zemo, zemo tattoo



tiao chih tai,
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Ladies Ladies!

ART SHOW



Sometimes, the only way you can relieve your frustration with a situation is to make a scene and allow something beautiful to happen. This is exactly what Elvia Iannaccone Gezlev did when she launched the *Ladies Ladies! Art Show* in 2010. Tired of her male-dominated environment, she wanted to showcase the diversity of art produced in the female tattoo world. The *Ladies Ladies! Art Show* (curated by Elvia, together with Martina Secondo Russo) had its fifth incarnation at the MF Gallery in Brooklyn, New York, last month. Featuring no less than 50 artists, it was a tour de force celebrating contemporary female tattooing, as well as the women who paved the way for today's scene.

Please introduce yourself...

I've been a tattoo artist for sixteen years now (I won't tell you my age, but I'm no longer in my twenties!) and I'm also a photographer and curator. I'm from Milan in Italy, but I've lived in New York City since 2002. I'm a mom of three boys, and a dog, and I'm an avid collector of tattoo art and vintage toys.

When and why did you found the *Ladies Ladies! Art Show*?

The idea came up in 2010. I was going through a moment of frustration at work... feeling left out, alone, and not at all happy with my environment at the tattoo shop where I was working. I was just venting with fellow tattoo artist Emma Griffiths and we came up with this crazy idea of actually doing something exciting to support tattooing for once! Something for the women of the industry, to help us connect with each other and maybe support one another. And what better than an art show... So we joined forces and we did it! We really didn't have a clue what we were doing, but made it happen and the response was awesome. That was December 2010.



Who took part in that first show?

We invited the artists we admired and also a few old timers of the industry (who rarely get invited to participate in art shows) then we found the right location and boom! the magic happened! That first time, we had Vyvyn Lazonga, Juli Moon, Debbie Lenz, Pat Sinatra, Stephanie Tamez and Michelle Myles all coming to the opening. Denise De La Cerda, Annette Larue, Debra Yarian and Kate Hellenbrandt all supported us by sending art works for the show. And Cindy Ray too! Those were just a few of the names among many. We were stoked.

What were your aims for the show?

Creating connections, joining forces with other female tattooers out there, and sharing art and experiences. Also paying tribute to the veterans, the women who started tattooing two, three, four decades ago – or earlier – when it wasn't so cool to be a tattoo artist, and it was an extremely unusual occupation for a woman. Nowadays, the number of women tattooing professionally is growing exponentially and that's something to acknowledge and celebrate. So ultimately the goal was to create a space and a platform where all of the above could be expressed!



How many people exhibited?

We had art from 50 tattooers right away. It was a lot! I don't know exactly how many people came, but it was a big place and it was packed. The energy was great. Each time we've run the show we've had amazing artists submitting work – the really big names of tattooing, including MaryJoy, Claudia DeSabe, Rose Hardy, Katie Gray, Virginia Elwood, Marie Sena, Holly Ellis... all sorts of badass talent like Becca Gene Bacon, Marina Inoue, Sara Antoinette Martin, Anna Sandberg, Gill Gold, Rose Whittaker, Anna Melo, Jamie Ruth, Dawn Cooke, Jackie Dunn Smith... through to newer artists Holly Ashby, Itoyo, Lara Scotton, missJuliet and Katya Krasnova... The list goes on. There isn't enough space to name them all, but I wish I could.





Is it invitation only?

Yes. But we try to keep it as inclusive as possible, inviting submissions from tattoo apprentices and young tattooers as well as seasoned tattooers and popular names – and everyone in between.

Would you consider incorporating trans tattooers?

Yes of course. If they identify as female sure, why not?

Are there any particular criteria for the art works?

Not really. We usually don't have a theme either. We just want the artists to choose what they want to show. All we specify is that it





must have a connection to their tattoo style. As long as it's genuine and it resonates with the artist, all styles are welcome. It's nice to see the differences, and the similarities, that make tattoo art into a language – on skin and on canvas. Sometimes I see something an artist is working on and I personally ask them to submit it.

Do you have 'quotas' for different styles or genres?

No. It's kind of random. Speaking for myself, I go with what I love in that moment. But we do try to cover pretty much everything – American traditional, Japanese, realism, conceptual, and so on. The Ladies Ladies! Art Show is a window on what tattooing has to offer, seen through our eyes.

What are the challenges of curating a show like this?

There's a ton of work behind the scenes. All the communications, the general organising of everything, the occasional disagreements between curators... and sometimes artists just flake... There's a lot goes into making that picture appear on the wall. But the end result is worth it. It's so satisfying. It's not really a money-making thing, but hopefully we sell some art too. Someone needed to make this happen, and I'm so happy I'm the person doing it.

What happens to the work when the exhibition is over?

When we see work being sold, that's a really good feeling. The least fun part is shipping the unsold art back to the artists. Sometimes I get to keep a piece or two for myself, and that just makes my day.

Over the years, have you noticed any trends in the art?

There are many trends. I like to look at what's new and what's different each year, but I also value tradition and I always try to find the connections between the past and the future. We need to preserve – and showcase – the soul of tattooing because nowadays our technological world is moving so fast and things can easily get lost. So I'm not really into trends. I'm more into foundations. One thing I have noticed is that there are maybe more interviews and blog posts on women artists... but there still aren't enough. There's incredible creativity out there.

Why is it important to honour the women who paved the way?

There's history and tradition behind this cool profession of tattooing. Being a tattoo artist isn't always easy. You might have to make sacrifices, and you might need some luck too, but if you have talent and a strong work ethic you can be successful. Being a woman in a tattooing environment can be really challenging, especially when you have a family and kids – long hours, difficult clients,





double standards and discrimination... many things can happen in a tattoo shop. And this was especially true back in the day, when the whole industry was male-dominated and biker-related. A tattoo shop was no place for a woman to work – or at least not just any woman. You had to grow some balls! And we need to honour that.

How has Ladies Ladies! Art Show evolved? And where will it go from here?

This year, we moved from tattoo parlours into an actual gallery – but we may well go back to the tattoo shops another year, since that's where it all originates from. We've been in some great locations. We had a break of three years between the last show and this one, and we weren't really sure if we were going to do another one, so I took over the Instagram account and started working on it, just for fun, showcasing all my fave female tattooers. Maybe it will go viral one day or maybe I will just let it go, I don't know, but doing it made me realise just how many tattooers are out there. It's a sea of amazing artists! I'm really passionate about this and I hope to keep on developing the project in the future. I'd love to organise more art shows for women and I'm also working on a series of photo/interview booklets called 'Ladies of Tattooing' (available from Blurb.com and also published on the Tattoo Life blog). It's all about celebrating the artistic awakening, the spiritual journey, the socio-cultural revolution that is women in tattooing! Pretty badass if you ask me!

For more info:
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Shelly D'Inferno

Shelly D'Inferno of Pyrohex is a woman who plays with fire and thoroughly enjoys it. She featured on the cover of Total Tattoo Issue 144 a couple of years ago and it was a real treat to meet her again.

Welcome back! What have you been up to since we last spoke?

I'm honoured to be back, thank you! I've been up to quite a lot, although still in the same direction of modelling and performing - as well as clothing design of course. I've had some incredible experiences, especially in terms of tours and shows. I was recently in Johannesburg, South Africa, performing with a rock 'n' roll circus in the legendary Joburg Theatre, which was super exciting. I did my first circus shows last year so this is still a new take on performing for me. And right now I'm preparing for another great performance with my troupe Pyrohex at the London Tattoo Convention!

Obviously your look has changed since you were last on the cover of Total Tattoo. Do you feel a pressure constantly to reinvent yourself in terms of your hair and make-up?

Oh no, not at all. It's kind of my thing to always change my looks - purely because I enjoy it. I totally understand it's great as a model to have a specific signature look, but it also works wonders to be able to be a bit of a chameleon so clients can see you are versatile.

What has been your most well-received shoot or look?

I had a really successful shoot with SFX make-up artist Kate Griffiths. We did a couple of alien looks where I was bald and looking very creepy. It was absolutely amazing and people really loved it. Another one was a look I did with MichellexStar where I had huge neon green pigtailed and we shot in a very gothic kind of location. I think it's usually my crazier looks that are the most successful, as my fans are mostly into the more alternative fashions.

What has been your favourite photoshoot to date?

Probably my whole photography trip to Iceland. We were shooting every day in the most incredible natural locations. I always love to organise trips and the tour to Iceland was probably the most extraordinary one so far. It was such a purifying experience for body and soul. What a country!

What do you look to for inspiration behind sets and outfits?

It can come from anything I see. Most of the time I don't really know the specific source; it's usually impossible to identify exactly when and where I picked up the inspiration for a particular piece of work. I think with all the impressions I get from films, photography, song lyrics, music and other people's work it all just ends up in a big mixed archive in my head and eventually becomes something I recreate.

Do you think there is an increased pressure for alternative models to be more alternative or extreme?

There isn't necessarily a pressure to be more alternative or extreme, but I do definitely recognise another kind of pressure - something that always sits at the back of your head (whether or not it comes into your conscious thoughts) - and that's the pressure for increased exposure and what we nowadays call "likes". Being hungry for exposure is a good thing for yourself as a business, but when it leads to models portraying their 'private lives' on social media it's not always healthy. It can take over one's focus.

You recently spoke out against cat-calling and about the need for women to feel safe

when going out. How does this affect you, and how do you deal with unwanted attention?

The way it affects me is that I choose to wear clothes in which I feel "safe" rather than the clothes I feel good in and want to wear. If I go for a night out I feel like I have to bring tights or a long coat to cover my bare legs or my outfit when I'm on my way back home. I feel like I need to bring something that will cover me up so I receive minimal unwanted attention. It's a sad thing, but I think that's the way for most women. If I look either dressed up or "sexy" I always get cat-called, and when - as a woman - it's something you have had to deal with throughout your life it eventually gets really annoying and aggravating. Most of the time I ignore cat-calling and keep walking, but sometimes I get angry and tell them I'm not interested or to shut up. And ninety percent of the time when I talk back, guys will change their attitude completely and call me a bitch. They just can't deal with it. Ironic, huh?

You have portrait tattoos. This is a genre that is currently enjoying massive success in the tattoo world. How would you feel if one of your fans had a tattoo of you?

I love portrait tattoos - and this very thing has actually happened quite a few times. It's always a little strange, but I feel so honoured that someone has enjoyed my work so much - or likes that one particular picture of me so much - that they want it on their skin. It's unbelievable really... but as someone who has portrait tattoos of other people, it's something I ought to be able to understand, isn't it!?



Have you ever considered taking up tattooing yourself?

It seems like such an awesome job and I do enjoy drawing, but if I ever started tattooing it would probably only be on myself - or maybe a friend, if I felt confident enough and had the guidance of one of the tattoo artists I know.

Your modelling and your performances with Pyrohex have taken you all over the world. What advice would you give to someone trying to break into the industry?

Love what you do. If you have the passion, you can do it. If you have that will and love for something, you will find a way to make it work. I knew nothing about modelling and performing once upon a time, and because I had the will and curiosity to learn and succeed - I did. Everyone has this potential inside them. I truly believe that. Also, the journey towards your goal is a success in itself. It's in our nature to seek to improve ourselves and I believe it makes us feel good.

Pyrohex was founded five years ago. Did you ever imagine it would be so successful?

Actually, yes! On most other topics, I would probably answer "no" to that question, but on this one I have to say "yes"! We were all already working hard on our solo careers and each one of us had such a strong fan base I could see our potential even in the early days. We were a bunch of friends who were passionate to put on dynamic, fun shows. Mix that with the careers we had already... and, well, I reckon most people can see why it's been so successful. I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together. And I'm proud to part of it.



Tell us some of your personal Pyrohex highlights...

I still remember our first huge music festival gigs like Download Festival and Hellfest. And when the crowd was chanting "Pyrohex" (or as the Bloodstock festival preferred it "Tits & Fire"!) that was awesome. These were very emotional and adrenaline filled moments that I will always think back on. The London Tattoo Convention has always been a true gem for us too and I can't wait to be back there.

What do you hope the next five years will bring?

I would love to perform with more bands. It's so much fun to mix a live music show with fire. We just performed with Wednesday 13 at this year's Bloodstock festival and it was a huge success. We had several different outfits, smoke bombs, fire and dynamic routines. I really loved it!

And you are moving towards getting behind the lens a bit more?

Absolutely! I've always enjoyed being on both sides of the lens. I've done a lot of photography work before whenever I've had a bit more time. I remember sitting myself down many years back and telling myself I have to focus on fewer things - because I've always wanted to do too much. I decided to focus on performing and modelling to begin with, then gradually move towards other things (like photography and my clothing business) as I grow older. I'm really excited about all the possibilities!

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ALEX MAY HUGHES



Interview by Lizzy Guy
Pictures by/courtesy of
Alex May Hughes



Alex May Hughes is a sign painter who works almost exclusively on glass. She uses a lot of gold leaf, and incorporates mother-of-pearl, butterfly wings... and anything else she feels like experimenting with! She paints too. Ranging from large-scale work for corporate clients to smaller-scale private commissions and individual exhibition pieces, her work is becoming highly sought after.

What first got you interested in sign painting?

I studied typography and graphic design at the London College of Communication. Although they had incredible printing resources (it used to be called the London College of Printing after all!) the course I was doing was very heavily computer-based which I *hated* and couldn't get on with at all. Pretty much everything I did on that course was rebelling against that. One of our projects was taking a piece of text and translating it into a relevant medium. I was reading HG Well's 'The Island of Dr Moreau' at the time, and I got to thinking about the Victorian era, and nineteenth century lettering and type – all those amazing signs and mirrors that you see – and I was like, 'Yeah!'



And suddenly you were inspired!

Very much so. 'The Island of Dr Moreau' is actually about vivisection. It's really gnarly. So I made all these beautiful-looking mirrors with weird stuff on them. I really enjoyed it. After graduating, I found a guy called Sam Roberts (who runs Better Letters) who was starting to put on sign painting workshops and demonstrations. From there, I got an apprenticeship with a sign painter called Pete. So I was up and down ladders, painting people's shop fronts and learning the basics about paint, brushes and things like that. One of the jobs that we did involved gold leaf on glass, which isn't necessarily an everyday job for a sign painter. It looked amazing and all of the processes surrounding it fascinated me. From then on, I was hooked. It was all I wanted to do – that really specific aspect of sign painting! I've been doing it for nearly five years now.

What is it about glass?

The way you can work with gold on glass... It's unlike any other material. The mirror reflection that you get, if you're doing something like water gilding, simply can't be achieved on anything else. That, for me, is the really exciting thing. Also, glass is always a perfect surface. It's super smooth; you can clean it; and if you mess something up you can usually go back a step (within reason!) by scraping sections off or melting the paint or whatever. I've done the odd job on wood or some other material, but I've mainly dug my heels in and said, 'No, glass is the thing for me.'





But I guess it has its hazards...

Glass can be quite forgiving, but it can also break pretty easily! It can also get scratched. And you get cuts a lot of the time – but it's not the worst, just a bit annoying.

How do you decide what else to incorporate in the piece?

I guess it depends, but you can use a lot of different materials. What's cool about glass is that the finished surface is always going to be smooth, so you can really play with texture behind it. It becomes a little more difficult if you have to tape something down because you can't get it wet with varnish or glue. A lot of what I do has been done before, but some of it is me making it interesting for myself by trying out new things.

And presumably when you're working on a mirror you're seeing everything in reverse?

Yes, but I'm so used to it now I struggle if I have to do something that's the 'right way round'! If I can read it, it feels weird!

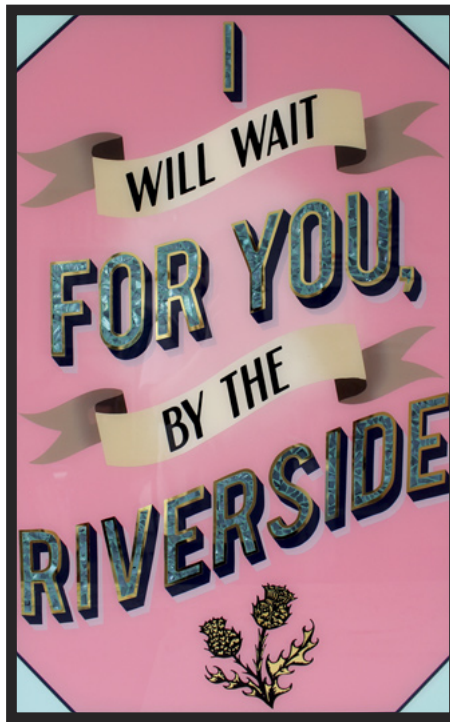


It's great that you can take something so traditional and bring it into the 21st century.

Absolutely. There are sign painters who stick to traditional styles, but I prefer more modern, fun and blocky designs. I like my work to be more playful, or more accessible perhaps, especially when it's a commission that's going to be in someone's home, reflecting their personality. If it's a company logo, then of course you don't get so much stylistic freedom.

Do you still use traditional processes?

I use both modern and traditional techniques. Most people want to see an image or final design before they agree to it and it's not practical for me to hand-draw every single thing, so I produce a rough layout on a computer, and perhaps add some hand-finished elements. Again, if it's for a company and I have to stick closely to the corporate artwork that I've been given, I'll use digital as it's much more practical.



Are you generally given a lot of free rein?

Not as much as I'd like! [Laughs] It depends. Sometimes people will have a very clear idea of what they want, or they will send images of signs I've done before and point out which elements they really like. It's like any other situation where you're making a bespoke item; sometimes it's a long process of going back and forth. When I'm commissioned to do a sign for another creative, or someone who works in design, that can be a blessing or a curse, because they can either be very easy going or they can be very particular. If I don't have any freedom at all, the danger is that I will end up producing something that doesn't look like my work. But ultimately, I'm providing a service and if they're happy then I'm happy.

Do you ever find it hard to part with something you've made?

It's happened a couple of times. But I know I can't get attached to it if it's something I've specifically made for somebody else. When I've made stuff for exhibitions, though, I have to admit that I sometimes hope my favourite pieces don't sell! Saying that, I have a rule: Once I've made something, I give it a week, then I say to myself, 'Nope, I don't wanna look at that any more' (even if it's something I really like). I don't have any of my signs at home. They're all here at the studio. Essentially all I do all day is look at shiny gold, which I love, but when I go home it's like I need to rest my eyes and kind of switch off. I think the separation of the physical aspects of 'work' and 'home' is really healthy, and having the studio enables me to do that.

Do you switch off from emails and social media too?

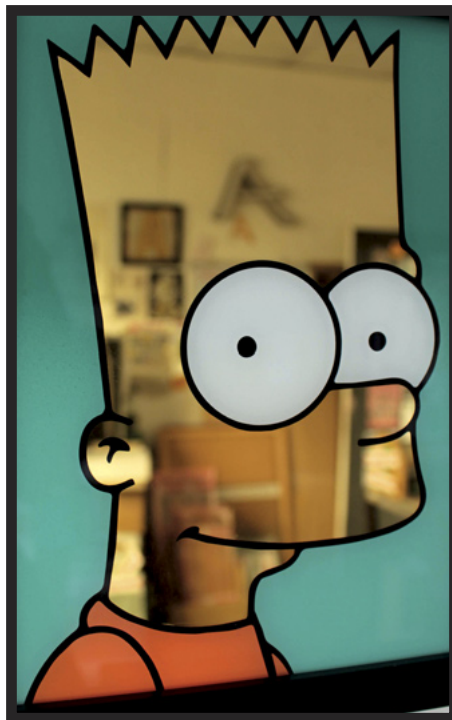
I wish I was like that, but I'm so bad! I wake up at 6.30am, do my social media and emails, come to work, work all day long, answer emails... and then when I go home, I'll find myself doing more emails and design until about 9pm. But I really like my job, so I'm not moaning! I wish I had the willpower to be able to switch off at something like 7pm, but it's hard to stop thinking about work – especially when I get a last-minute order for something like a wedding gift, and it's a really cool piece.

Do you ever find it difficult to stay motivated, working on your own?

I really like my own company and being on my own! I'm from a family of six, so I know what's it's like to be around people. I don't mind that, but I enjoy coming here to the studio for peace and quiet. I listen to the radio and get on with my work. It's almost like recharge time. I listen to a lot of radio and podcasts!

Do you see your work developing in any particular direction?

Having this studio means I can now work on larger scale pieces, which is really good fun. And these bigger pieces are often commercial commissions that will be on display in public spaces and offices, so they'll be seen by more people, which I hope will then create even more interest...



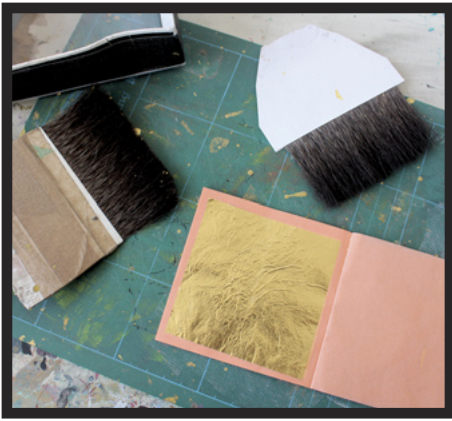
Tell us about some of the work you've done.

Well, I've done some cool signs for tattooists. The tattoo and sign painting worlds are quite closely linked in many ways. I did some glass panels for Clio Peppiatt for London Fashion Week. Also, I did a bunch of stuff involving song lyrics for the offices of Warner Bros Records. And I did the cover of Stylist magazine – 'The Quest for the Perfect Gin'. That was a really fun one. Stylist has a history of doing really interesting covers and working alongside artists and designers.

So it's not always glass?

No, I paint too. It keeps things interesting for me; I like the immediacy of painting. And it's not just letters. I once did Mary Magdalene for The Times, for an item connected with the movie. That was a dream to do! It was very similar in style to all those incredible Italian paintings; I got to combine traditional elements but throw in some gold and shell. The finished piece looked really nice but inevitably it didn't translate so well into print.



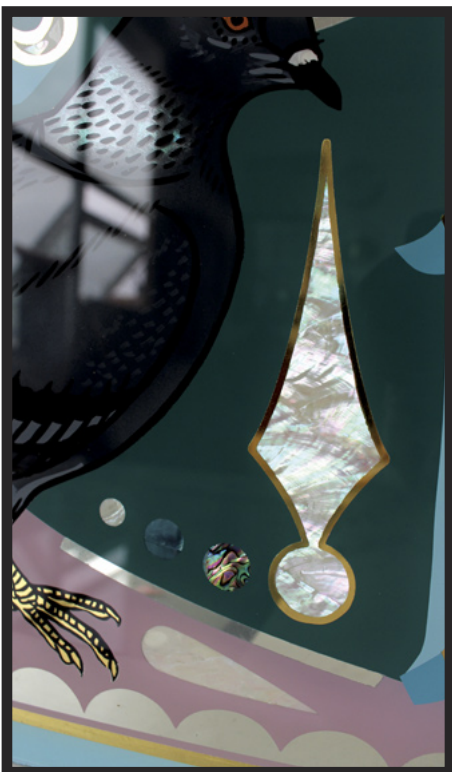


And the Simpsons?

The Simpsons thing kinda started out as a joke. It was one of the very first things that I did, right at the beginning of my career. I really love The Simpsons, and I thought to myself, 'They've got yellow skin, gold is yellow...', so I literally painted a Bart, gilded him, put it on Instagram and suddenly people wanted to buy it! Then I got asked to do a Homer... and four years later I'm still being asked! That stuff is more of a passion project. I don't make much money from it. But I've found that people who like The Simpsons are usually *really* funny; the emails I get from them are hilarious. In a sea of very serious commissions, I will get one that's just, like, ridiculous and full of Simpsons quotes...

Who else inspires you?

There are glass workers out there doing cool, modern stuff that blows my mind. I follow a ton of sign painters, and also a ton of random other artists. Even other artists' colours can inspire me. I really like what Vivrant Things are doing... and Aaron Jupin is a painter whose work I love. It's very different to what I do, so looking at it is almost like a break for my eyes!





Do you have a particular favourite among the pieces you've done?

I really like the piece I made recently for the Letterheads meet in London [an international gathering of signwriters and lettering artists - ed]. Thirty or so artists were exhibiting, and the whole show was based on the concept of old-fashioned pictorial shop signs. We each chose a sign and interpreted it in our own way. I picked 'All the World and his Wife' – for which I created a 1950s-style alien wife who married a world!

Yours is a traditional craft in a modern world. Do you feel threatened? Or has there been a sign painting renaissance?

In the 1980s, you had real sign painters – but then computers came along and plastic ruined all their careers because everybody wanted cheap work. There's definitely been a renaissance. People understand sign painting again now, they know what it is, and they want it. For a businesses that wants to stand out, it's great to have something that's hand-made and eye-catching. All of the Prets in London have hand-painted signs and they're a business that really cares, so they're spreading the message and that's huge. Social media helps a lot. There's a café in Hackney called Palm Vaults. I designed their sign and made it with my friend Ash, who is also a sign painter. I read somewhere that it's the most Instagrammed coffee shop in the country – or something like that! The sign is pink, with palm trees, so it really stands out, especially because it's on a fairly dingy-looking road. I've got a lot of commissions from that sign!

What would your dream commission be?

I was thinking about this the other day... and one thing I'd love to do is make a sign to appear in a Wes Anderson film. I love his films, so that would be really cool. A sign painting commission is ultimately about collaborating and smashing your worlds together to create something that has a bit of both of you in it!

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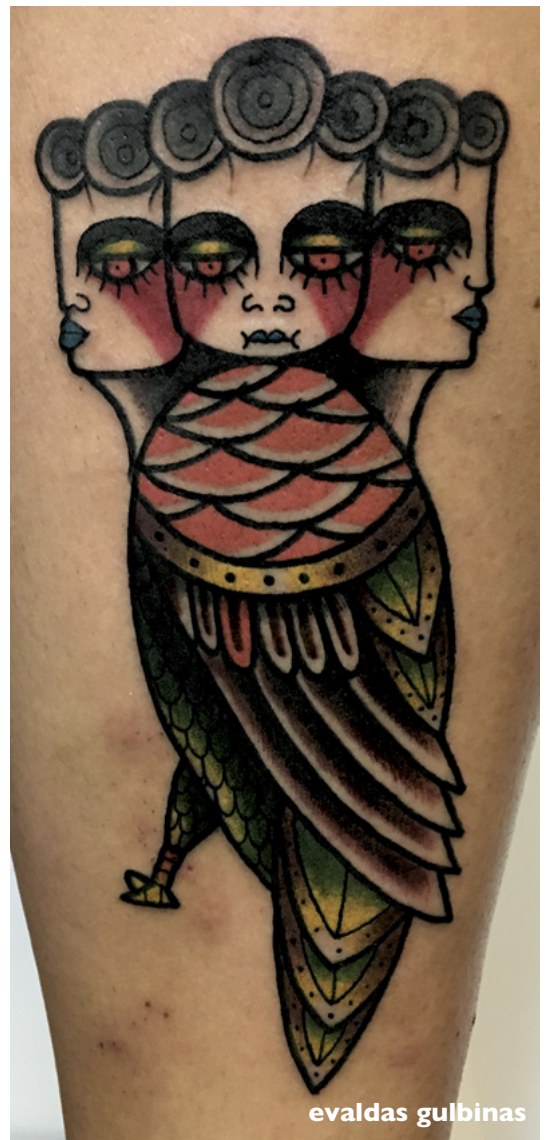
vincent zattera, bloodline tattoo



ell torres,
dock street tattoo



alex hennerly,
adorned tattoo



evaldas gulbinas



niorkz, horizon tattoo co



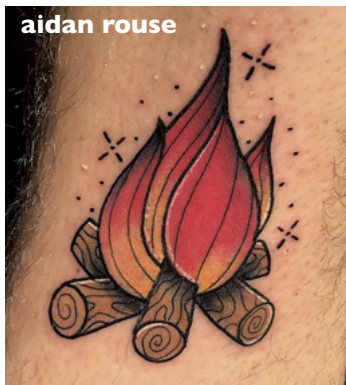
lizzie renaud, speakeasy (canada)



ben chidgey



trawczynski, modern electric



aidan rouse



dave ashton
all style tattoos



dave valentine, artisti-
cally engineered tat-



abbie
johnston,
studio 58



martin marshall, rising phoenix



edgar ivanov, old london road



del boi,
electric artz tattoos



darya pirozhenko,
piro jenko tattoo (russia)



ross lee, inkaddiction



kyle shields, empire ink



santa perpetua,
private studio



clarke dudley, rendition tattoo



ick lovene, new wave tattoo



ryan bowey
electric punch



gari henderson,
masamune tattoo

luke wrigley



kaja novsak, fht bathgate



luke stubbs, skin kandi



mark diamond,
studio XIII



yarson, yarson tattoo



DIAO ZUO

We first became aware of Diao Zuo when we saw him at the Mondial du Tatouage in Paris. Despite the fact that he was surrounded by a roomful of world-class artists, his work simply shone out. His backpieces and bodysuits are a joy to behold and a feast for the eyes. They're perfectly constructed, and every element is amazing – the flowing curves of his wind bars, the exquisite foreground details, the silky smooth black-and-grey shading, and his steady, even lines. Diao Zuo learnt to tattoo at the tender age of just fifteen and has been committed to his art ever since. He has earned his place on the world stage through true professionalism, utter dedication, and extraordinary talent.





What first attracted you to tattooing?

I was fascinated by gangster culture. Being a tattoo artist working in the traditional Japanese style feels like a respectful approach to that culture.

And does the Japanese style appeal to you aesthetically too?

I like its cultural background and historical meaning. And most importantly, the 'forbidden' aspect of this sacred tradition.

Why are Japanese-style tattoos so popular in Taiwan?

For the first half of the twentieth century (from 1895 to 1945) Taiwan was a Japanese colony, part of the Empire of Japan. Japanese-style tattooing has been popular ever since then. It's been underground though, a kind of subcultural genre.



Are tattoos generally popular in Taiwan now?

Yes, there are three or four major conventions every year.

Tell us your earliest tattoo memory...

I grew up in a small village in Taiwan and my first encounter with tattoos was the day I met a local gangster and was amazed by the beautiful art on his body! That was when I was fourteen years old.

And is that when you decided you wanted to become a tattoo artist?

It wasn't an immediate thing of course, but it didn't take me very long to realise that this was what I wanted to do.

What was the first tattoo you ever did?

I did my first tattoo on a friend when I was fifteen. It was a Buddhist god of death.

Did you study art?

I attended public senior high school and majored in Visual Design. This gave me useful background knowledge like colour theory, and enabled me to develop essential skills such as sketching. I've always admired Japanese Ukiyo-e and I've studied Ukiyo-e images in lots of books.

In embarking on your tattoo career, who were you inspired by?

I was greatly inspired by Horitada sensei in Japan.

Have you been influenced by any aspects of Western tattooing?

I didn't study Western art history in my formative years, and Western-style tattooing isn't really in my realm of experience, but I've certainly encountered many amazing Western-style tattoos when attending conventions







overseas! I enjoy the interaction between cultures at tattoo conventions, and when travelling generally. Most European conventions are very kind to me.

Do you only do large scale work?

Usually, yes – although I do sometimes do smaller Japanese pieces at overseas conventions.

Tell us about the consultation process you have with your clients.

Most of the clients who come to me are seeking a design by me. They don't usually bring a specific brief. During the consultation process, I only discuss the main character of the tattoo with them. The rest is all about the trust they have in me.

Is it difficult to find clients with no previous tattoos who want a bodysuit?

Ninety percent of my clients come to me with a clean body. I value that enormously. It feels like a kind of respect – a real acknowledgement and appreciation of what I do.

What is the most challenging aspect of your work?

The hard work lies in researching the historical background, and getting the features and attributes of the characters absolutely right. Everything about the design must be of the highest quality, so our team often travels to Japan for the purpose of historical research.

What do you like most about tattooing?

The feeling of being part of a very powerful art culture, and the sense of achievement I get from my work. Those are the reasons I continue to dedicate myself to tattooing.







You have two apprentices. Do you regret not going down the route of an apprenticeship yourself?

I don't regret that at all. Everything we do, and everything that surrounds us, is part of our learning process.

What do you look for in an apprentice?

I look for innate talent, a stable personality, and indications that the person will be reliable and diligent in their work.

What are your own plans for the future?

One thing I want to do is publish a book of my art in a few years' time.

Diao Zuo

No. 12 Yongchang W. St, Douliu City, Yunlin County 640, Taiwan (R.O.C)

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BLACKPOOL TATCON 2018



Our arrival into Blackpool was a stormy one. The summer had finally broken and in its place was grey clouds and rain. We pulled up outside the Norbreck Castle Hotel and went inside, looking forward to the usual warm welcome.

The Norbreck Castle Hotel is an experience, to say the least. Situated on the seafront, about a mile from the famous Blackpool Tower and Illuminations, this gargantuan, peach-coloured folly was to be our home-from-home for the weekend, as well as the venue for this year's Blackpool Tatcon. Breakfast and an evening meal were included in the price, which makes this a really convenient and affordable convention if you're coming from afar. However, if the idea of conversing with either your tattoo peers or the odd unsuspecting holidaymaker over your hash browns doesn't appeal, there are plenty of other accommodation choices nearby. This is Blackpool, after all!

The convention was advertised as a three-day event, but in reality, for the public, it was more of a two-day show. On the Friday, artists worked on their pre-booked appointments and eased into the weekend by setting up and catching up with fellow tattooists. This gave us a great opportunity to have a walk around, say hello and check out the portfolios on offer. I say portfolios, but we've definitely noticed that there's not so many of them around these days... And it's not just a lack of proper printed portfolios to browse through. Many artists aren't giving convention visitors any kind of opportunity to check out their work as they wander round the various booths at the convention. Sometimes, an instagram address on a piece of paper is all that's on offer! Come on tattooists - don't deprive visitors of this simple pleasure, and don't do yourself out of the business that might come from it!

After an eventful night of fire alarms, we were up bright and early on the Saturday for a more public affair as the weekend kicked off. Unfortunately for Pat, the organiser, the weekend didn't start so well as he broke his leg during one of the night's false alarm evacuations! But that didn't appear to diminish his enthusiasm in any way, and he managed to maintain his positive energy throughout the entire weekend (even though, on both days, the show started at 10am and continued long into the evening).



1. lauren roberts, adara tattoo collective
2. a full roster of entertainment
3. shane gleave, shipwrecked tattoo company
4. danny edwards, bold street
5. bradley thompson, bold street
6. geofferson longley, studio 59

3.



4.

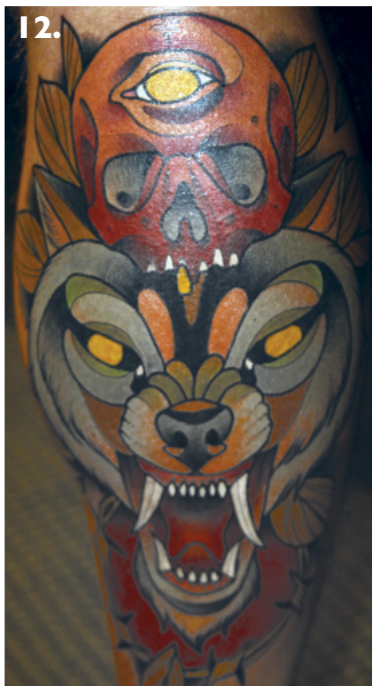


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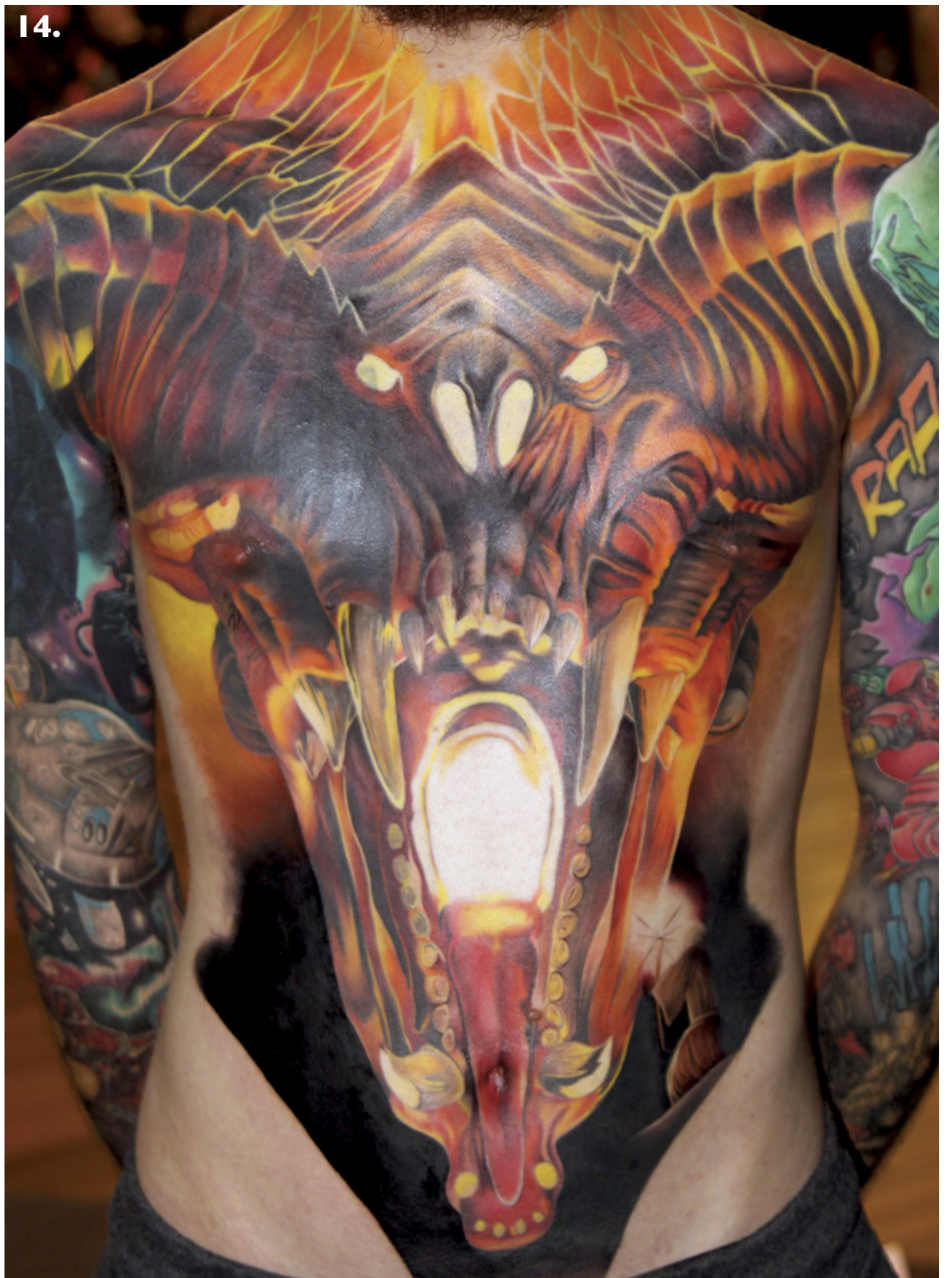


13.

Being close to the seaside means that this convention is always family friendly. The entertainment on offer catered well to all age groups. As well as face painting, there was a plethora of performers, including contortionists, live music, burlesque, and a very convincing AC/DC tribute band! And, unlike at other shows, the artists didn't seem to mind being in the thick of it. Whether this was their first Tatcon, or they return year after year, a lot of them told me how much they like working at this event.

We had the pleasure of judging the competitions over the weekend, and I have to say there was some cracking work on show. One category, 'Best Apprentice', left the judging panel astounded at just how talented up-and-coming tattooists are nowadays. The winner, Sam Waiting, had only been tattooing since the start of the year! It was a well-deserved award, and we look forward to seeing how his work develops as his career progresses. As always, it will sound like we've been bribed if we give an individual mention to all the artists whose work we liked... Needless to say, however, this is an ideal little convention to go to if you want to pick up a great tattoo without breaking the bank. There was also a 'Best Tattoo as Judged by the Public' category, which was a really nice touch (even though there were so many entries). Artists might joke that members of the public don't know a good tattoo when they see one, but this unfair judgement was proved completely wrong here. And if you're paying to go to a convention, it's good to be able to have your say – and this competition category achieves exactly that!

I can't help feeling that a lot of people look down on this convention because of its location. It's perhaps wrongly assumed – as with the English seaside itself – that it's a bit kitsch and rough around the edges, with sand getting into all kinds of places you wouldn't normally want it to... But if you've not been before, do give it a try. It's a great convention to go to – affordable, with everything on-site, and very friendly.



14.

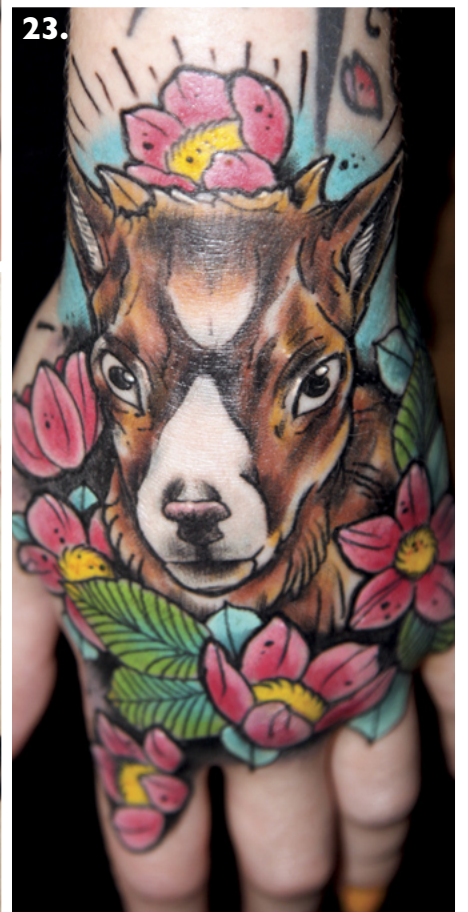
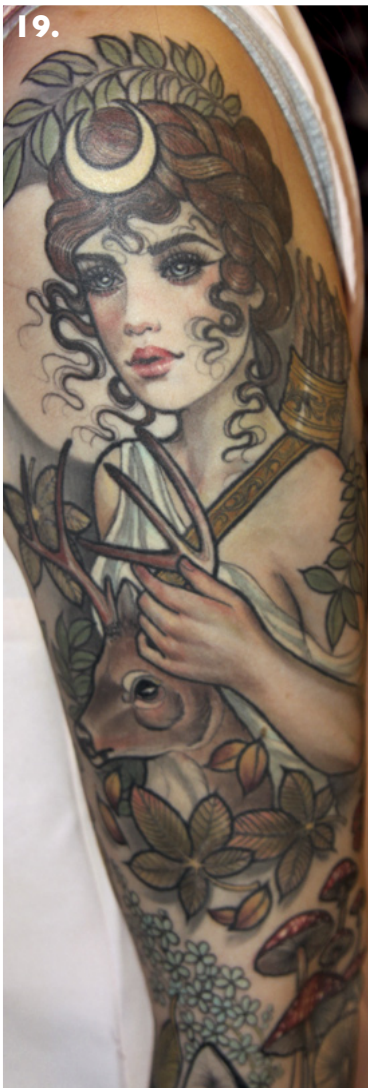


15.



16.

- 7. lee harding, revolution ink
- 8. adam knowles, studio IX
- 9. abbie johnston, studio 58
- 10. aaron Tomlinson, tattoo lounge
- 11. craig james, new ink tattoo
- 12. danny edwards, bold street
- 13. del boi, electric artz
- 14. amy coleby, immortal ink
- 15. owl sanctuary
- 16. danny edwards, bold street



17. nick devine working
 18. rik baird,
 on point ink
 19. hanna flowers,
 20. lauren roberts,
 adara tattoo
 collective
 21. sick
 22. sii, shipwrecked
 tattoo company
 23. del boi,
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VAINIUS ANOMALY

Vainius is a Lithuanian artist whose attention detail and love of the sinister is unrivalled. He combines dark images with a hint of light, allowing hope to co-exist within beautifully crafted images layered upon the skin, with textures that you can almost feel with your eyes.

How did your journey into tattooing begin?

It was very simple really. I used to design posters for local bands and music events. A friend who was already tattooing suggested I should try it because of my interest in art, and I enjoyed it from the word go.

Did you do a traditional apprenticeship?

Yes. After about six months of practicing on friends, I got placed as apprentice in a local studio in my hometown. It was a busy place, and I had to do all kinds of styles. They were usually just small tattoos though, and I wasn't given any proper teaching. All they wanted me to do was work as fast as possible and make as much money for the studio as I could. I watched lots of internet tutorials from professional tattooists, and whenever I got the chance to do a larger piece I tried out different machines, inks, needle configurations, and so on.

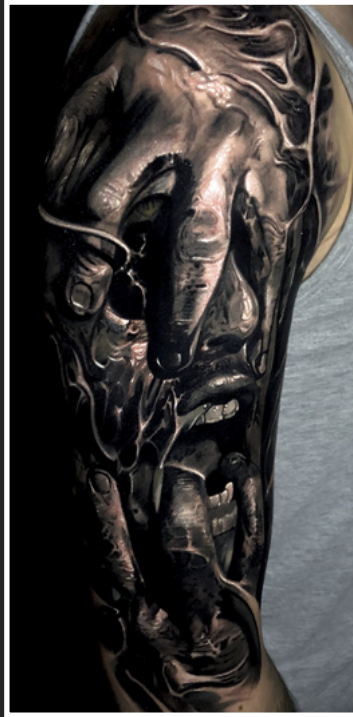
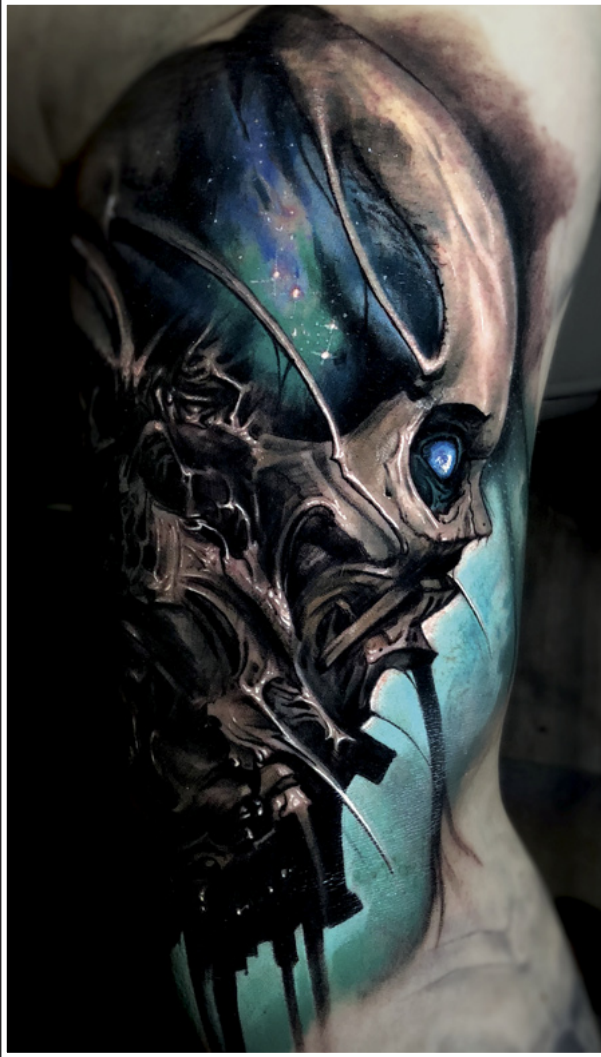
How did you develop your style?

My initial focus was on my technique; it was only later on that I began to explore and discover my own style – although it was more a matter of finding themes than developing an actual style. My tattooing has always been influenced by my passion for heavy metal, horror films and video games, and I always knew I wanted to work with designs that were realistic in some way. My wife is an illustrator and also a tattoo artist and she's given me lots of inspiration. She's always been so supportive of my ideas.

Did ever you study art in a formal way?

No, except for a few years ago when my wife bought me some art lessons as a present. When I started tattooing, I developed my drawing skills by re-working images I'd found on the internet. I studied Biology at university.





How important is it for a tattooist to be able to draw?
Tattooing IS drawing, just with different tools and a live canvas. Not matter what style of tattoos you do, you should be able to draw.

Is it better to be artistically creative or technically brilliant?
Both! Healing and longevity depend on how professionally a tattoo is done, and the kind of equipment you use. Technique is obviously important, but if you want to do interesting work and be somehow unique, you have to be creative too - otherwise you end up just doing copies.





Which other artists do you most admire?

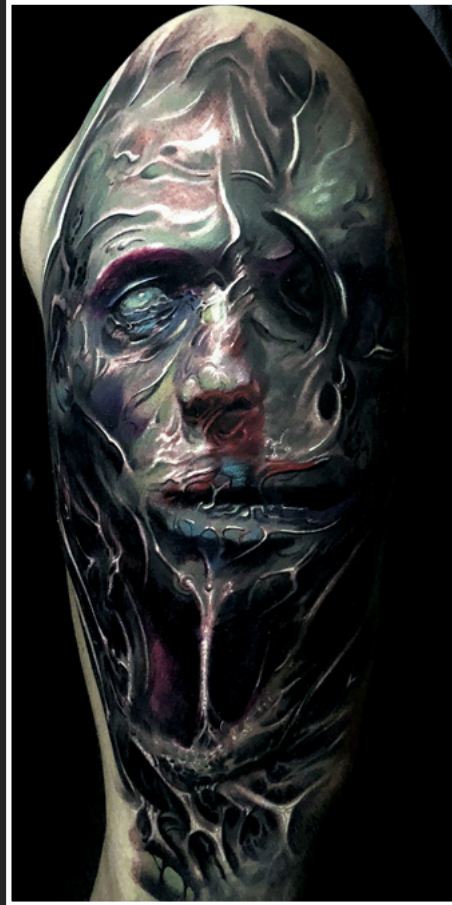
There are so many great artist in the world. Whatever their style and whatever their artistic medium – whether it's tattooing or some other art form – the main thing is the creativity involved, and the dedication of the artist to their work. Sometimes I admire a piece of art because of its technical skill, and sometimes it's because of the feeling I get from it.

How would you describe your own work?

It's always difficult to describe one's own work... but basically I see it as random evil shit with good vibes!

Do you have a particular reason for specialising in such dark imagery?

I like all horror-related art, so it's natural that I should try to bring that kind of feeling into my tattooing – which, in turn, means my customers have come to expect it from me! Mostly, my customers give me a clear idea of what they want to say with their tattoo, and sometimes it's a very specific image or a particular character. I put a lot of imagination into my designs, but I also make sure they will work well on the skin.



What's your favourite monster?
I like all kind of different monsters and creatures, but my favourite is probably Alien. The funny thing is, I think I've only actually done one Alien tattoo in the last five years!

What's your favourite horror movie?
I love all the classics - 'Alien' (1979), 'The Thing' (1982), 'The Silence of the Lambs' (1991) and so on. The last good one I saw was 'It' (2017).

For you, what's the most important element in a tattoo?
The most important thing is the idea. But that's tricky, because everybody sees things differently. Everybody has their own ideas about their tattoos - and sometimes people see things that other people just can't see. My work needs to be as unique as possible; it also needs to fit the body well, heal well, and have longevity.

Your work is incredibly detailed. How do you safeguard the skin against trauma?
I work as gently as possible, but there's nothing special about that - I just use good quality professional equipment and try to do my best to look after the customer's skin.

How important is your machine? Would you get the same results with someone else's machine?
A machine is a tool. If it's comfortable to use, you can work quickly and smoothly. You can get great results with any good machine. I've worked with a Cheyenne Pen for a few years, but I reckon I could get more or less the same results with any other quality machine.





Do you prefer using rotaries or coils?

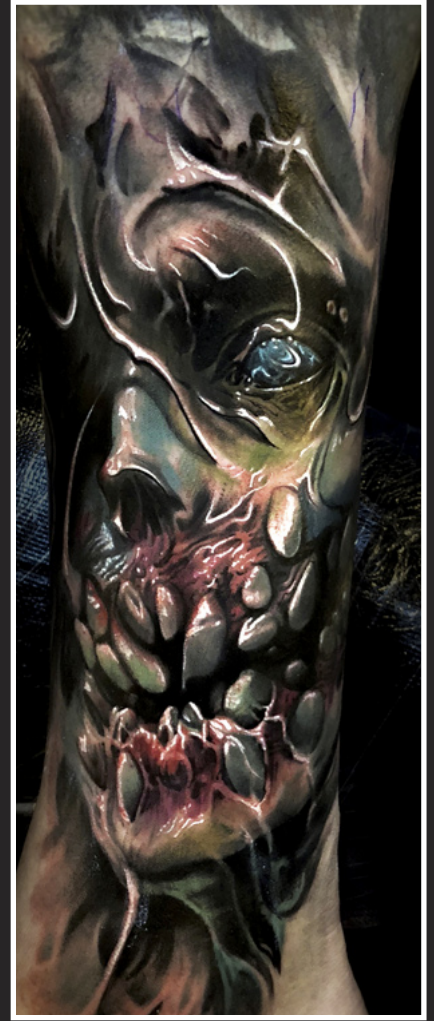
I used to work with coils, but then I moved to rotaries. They suit me better, as I use four or five different needle groupings on each piece and it's far easier to change the cartridge on one machine than use four or five machines. But I love how coil machines look... All those custom designs are just perfect!

Tell us about the ink you use.

I use mainly Intenze and World Famous inks, but I'm never averse to trying something new. An ink must be easy to use and easy to blend, but for me what's important is longevity, and how the ink settles in the skin - and of course the popular brands are already time-tested, so you know what to expect.

During the time you've been tattooing, do you think the industry has changed much?

Yes. I've only been tattooing for about five years, but even in that time it's changed a lot. Tattoos are becoming more and more popular, and new artists are coming along every day. As tattoo equipment improves, so does the quality of the art that is being produced. These days, you definitely have to work harder and harder to create something that customers are going to find interesting.





And does this expectation create stress?

Most of my stress comes from wanting each tattoo to be better than the previous one. Actually I don't think any artist is truly satisfied with what they produce. That's why they continue to create art!

How do you deal with stress? What do you do to relax?

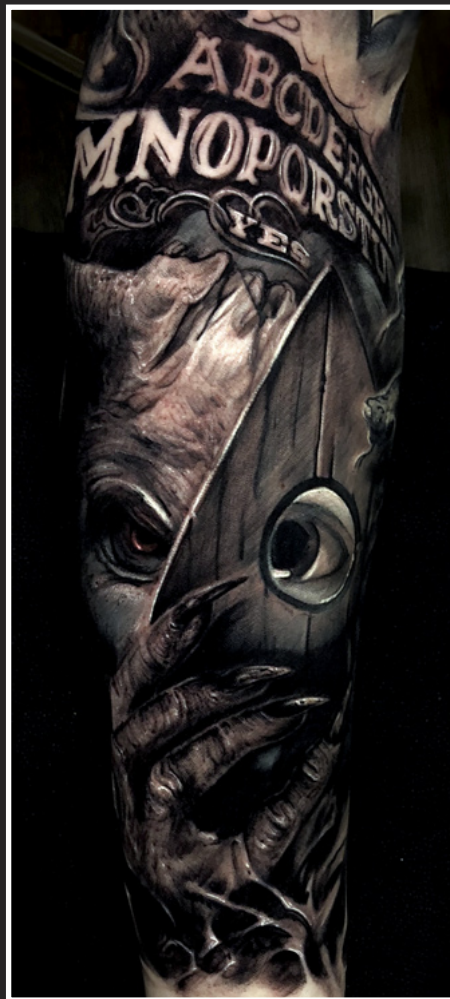
Music is the main thing that helps me deal with stress. And because I like metal, I can lose all my tension in heavy riffs, blast beats and proper screaming or growling! Before tattooing took over, I used to play drums a lot and I made a few records with two bands – Siluetless and Apricity. You can find them on Spotify. I live with music every day, at home, in the studio, in my car... and I love to go to festivals and concerts. Music is what inspires my creativity, and determines the mood in my art. I also like to spend time with my family, pets and friends of course! And video games help me escape the real world for a while. They're a major source of inspiration in my work too.

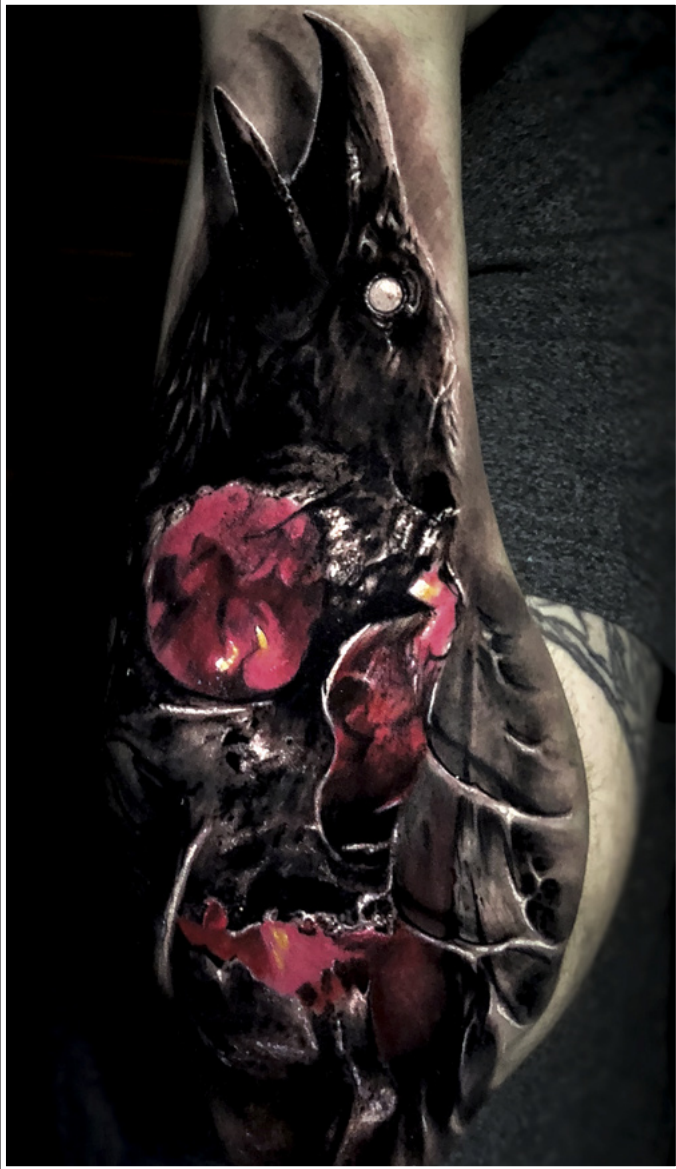
What are the best and worst aspects of tattooing?

For me, tattooing is the best job I could possibly imagine. It's more a lifestyle than work. You create art, and people like it! You can communicate with other artists, all of whom have a passion for what they do. And you can travel the world too. On the other hand, it's not as easy as it looks. You are responsible for what you do, and your customers will wear the results for the rest of their life. It takes a lot of time and dedication, so you have to love what you do. But it's my way of life, and it's how I express myself.

Is travel important to you?

Yes it is. I want to travel as much as I can (with my wife) to do guest spots and conventions around the world – for the enjoyment of it, and also to improve and develop my work. It's always interesting to visit other countries, meet other artists and potential customers, and make new friends. All conventions are different, but it's always good to participate. Sometimes I get more work, sometimes less, but there's never been a convention where people have rejected my work outright!





Tell us about the tattoo scene in Lithuania.

There are the young artists, and there are those who have been tattooing for a couple of decades, but tattoo culture in Lithuania has really only just started growing. The majority of customers are fairly conservative and usually ask for the kinds of tattoos that were popular in the late 90s, but recently that's been changing for the better. There are enough studios around the larger cities, but many of the high quality artists travel abroad and don't work so much in Lithuania. We certainly have some world class names, like Domantas Parvainis, Augis, Tomas Vaitkunas, Mary Duchess and others.

If you could change anything about the tattoo industry, what would it be?

That's not up to me - all I can do is change myself, and how I live my own life...

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the tattoo world?

Don't do it! But if you can't stop yourself, then put your entire self into it. Learn from the best and be better. And don't forget to enjoy it!

vainiusc@gmail.com
www.instagram.com/vainius.art



CATFISHING ON THE TATTOO SCENE

By Lizzy • Pictures supplied courtesy of the artists



Melina Wendlandt, Vaders Dye (Germany)



Aleksandra Katsan, (Ukraine)

**Do you trust your tattooist?
Do you believe they are who they say they are?
And that the work on their website is really theirs?**

Most people would probably answer, “Yes, of course!” without really thinking about it. And rightly so. In an ideal world, these questions wouldn't even need to be asked. But this is the real world, and we've recently heard about a couple of situations that are far from ideal – from the customer's point of view, and also for the industry as a whole.

Last month (in Total Tattoo Issue 168) we brought you a news item about a scratcher who had been tattooing underage kids. As if that wasn't worrying enough, he'd also been posing as a tattooist from a well known local shop. Scratchers are nothing new; dangerous, unhygienic working practices are nothing new; and tattooing underage customers is nothing new. But impersonating a tattooist from a well-regarded shop *as well*? That brings in a whole extra dimension of dishonesty. Every ounce of respect for one's customers, and for the industry itself, has clearly gone right out of the window when somebody does that. The potential for damage – to unsuspecting customers and also to the reputation of the shop in question – is immense. And in the eyes of the general public, it doesn't make the tattoo industry look too good either.

We've recently been made aware of another type of fraudulence in tattooing: false advertising. Most tattoo studios post pictures of their work somewhere – on their website, on their Facebook page, on Instagram, etc. But a certain UK shop recently saw fit to post OTHER PEOPLE'S pictures on their website, uncredited of course, leading many to assume that these fine tattoos were the work of artists at that shop. This is the ultimate insult to customers. It's a bit like catfishing on a dating site – pretending to be someone you're not in order to seduce someone – except that the result of the encounter could be some very regrettable ink that will be in someone's skin for life (and not the awesome tattoo they thought they were going to get).

Alex Bage, Fat Panda (UK)



RYAN THE SCIENTIST

“I think it’s a real shame when studios do things like this. It’s a scourge in our scene which falls into the same category as artists who edit their artwork to make it look better than it is. It’s basically conning clients and giving them a false representation of your work. In instances such as this, a studio will normally share work which is far superior in skill than what they can do themselves, meaning clients will be very disappointed with the tattoo they have on them for life afterwards. It’s also very disrespectful to the artists who did the original work, to be using their hard work to try to help you make an easy gain. If you can’t create good artwork and promote what you do honestly and properly – and have pride in your own work – then maybe you shouldn’t be tattooing at all.”

Of course unsuspecting customers get misled and deceived in all sectors of business. From holidays to sandwiches, it’s a common problem, and the theme of many a television programme. But when it comes to false advertising in tattooing... well, it could be argued that there’s a big difference between a tattoo-gone-wrong and a substandard holiday or disappointing lunch. Tattoos are rather more permanent and invasive.

Customers have to trust what they see in portfolios and online. In an article in the AMA Journal of Ethics* on ethical issues surrounding cosmetic surgery, Carly P Smith and Daniel George write: *“Although an online ‘relationship’ can help foster rapport by building a sense of familiarity or even trust before an in-person meeting ... it can also disrupt the normal ‘cautious consumer’ behaviour and decision making of prospective patients.”* This is as true in tattooing as it is in cosmetic surgery. With the rise of social media, potential customers needn’t go anywhere near a studio or convention to see an artist’s work; they can see their portfolio at the click of a button. Unfortunately, the discovery that their chosen tattooist isn’t what they seem can often come too late, leaving the customer feeling betrayed and cheated – with a potential ripple effect of negative feeling on a much wider scale.

And what about the relationship between the offending studio and its employees? If they’re using pictures of other people’s tattoos to advertise their shop, surely it begs the question, ‘Why are you not advertising your own artists?’

[=====that question needs to be in italics=====] In effect, they have insulted their entire team by implying that THEIR work is not up to standard, and not fit to be used for the purpose of promoting the studio.

Unfortunately, this proved to be EXACTLY the case when we looked at the tattoos that had actually been done by the tattooists who worked at that particular shop. Compared to the work of the artists whose pieces had been used to advertise the shop (and, we should emphasise, looked at with a very objective eye) their work looked very sub-standard.

The artists whose work was 'stolen' (or, if you prefer, 'borrowed' without permission) included Ryan the Scientist, Bicem Sinik, Melina, Adrian Bascur, Anna Bravo and Anka. They're well known names, and they have huge followings. Using reverse image searches online, we were able to see that the original pictures had been lifted from social media and then heavily edited and cropped. We also discovered that the offending studio was sharing drawings by Alex Bage (whose horrified



Ryan the Scientist, NR Studios

customers could even identify their own tattoo designs). Alex and Ryan have told us in some detail what this episode has meant to them, and we have reproduced their messages here.

Although the offending studio didn’t explicitly state that THEIR artists had done the work, this was certainly implied by the

*Source: <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/when-advertising-plastic-surgeons-individual-brand-unethical/2018-04>

Curt Montgomery, Holy Noir Tattoos (Canada)



fact they'd even added their own watermark to the photos. This would have involved removing the original watermark before replacing it with their own, whilst keeping the picture intact and disguising any evidence of the swap. No mean feat. And quite time-consuming too. With such fantastic photoshop skills, perhaps these guys are more suited to working in the graphic design business than the tattoo industry?

Now that this scandalous behaviour has been uncovered, and the artists affected have been informed, we're pleased to say

Anka, Black Iris Tattoo (USA)



Anna Bravo, France



that most of the fraudulent posts have been taken down. We've also learned that the studio itself has received a cease-and-desist letter from one of the artists' lawyers. But is this case just the tip of a very large and dirty iceberg?

We have to be realistic. The problem is nothing new. In pre-internet days, the theft of portfolios and sketchbooks was rife. And while you're reading this, tattooists all over the world will be uploading images that aren't their own in order to get those all-important likes, comments and shares. So what's going to change? Unfortunately, probably not a lot.

Even without diving into a discussion of the complexities of copyright, it's plain to see that this kind of thing is wrong. But intellectual property legislation, which covers issues such as copyright, can't possibly keep up with the growth and development of social media. And in any case, how could this kind of thing be policed? (And would anyone want it to be?) All we can do is work together to minimise the negative effects of such dishonesty and try to stamp it out.

- As a community, we can keep an eye out for uncredited pictures, tag any creators who have not been credited at source, and do the same when sharing images.
- If you're a tattooist, how about making sure you watermark any photographs you post online? This won't prevent others stealing and using them, but it will certainly make it harder for them to do so.
- If you're looking to get tattooed, make sure you thoroughly research your chosen artist. Make sure there's consistency in images of their work. If some of those images seem 'different' (especially in terms of quality) be prepared to ask questions!

It's a drop in the ocean, but it may make all the difference.

What do you think can be done? feel free to email us at totaltattoo@totaltattoo.co.uk



ALEX BAGE (FAT PANDA)

“In essence, having your artwork exploited to line someone else's pockets, or falsify the quality of what a customer can expect from the person/shop exploiting it, is what's wrong here. A dishonest tactic to profit quickly rather than putting the leg work into creating a solid offering themselves. There is no fast-track here and it will ultimately lead to a spoiled reputation for that artist, their shop and, along with it, their co-workers.

“Sadly, from a creative point of view they're robbing themselves of the positive sense of accomplishment that comes with completing a design, as well as any learning or development that is attached to that. As far as applying a tattoo that someone else has drawn up in red pencil... trying to figure out or reverse engineer everything in order to make sure it looks decent involves far more effort than tattooing something you've drawn yourself. I make 90% of the shading/colour/finishing touches up on the fly!

“My personal gripe is that sitting down to honestly craft a unique design for a customer, or to extend an 'available' portfolio of artwork, can often take hours – hours that could be swapped for time with family, playing, relaxing and so on; so having someone just pluck something from your Facebook or Instagram account and regurgitate it as their own is simply lazy and disrespectful. Those same designs often end up in people's skin. I receive messages weekly, usually diluted or subpar versions of what I would have done with it myself.

“Don't get me wrong, it's flattering too (that's what we have to tell ourselves to make it feel less like a mugging). It means we're doing something right if people want to rinse it. And yes, 'inspiring' people can be a heartwarming, affirming and positive repercussion from posting designs... but there is an ocean of difference between people being inspired and simply taking someone else's concepts and drawings as their own.”

BIG NORTH TATTOO SHOW



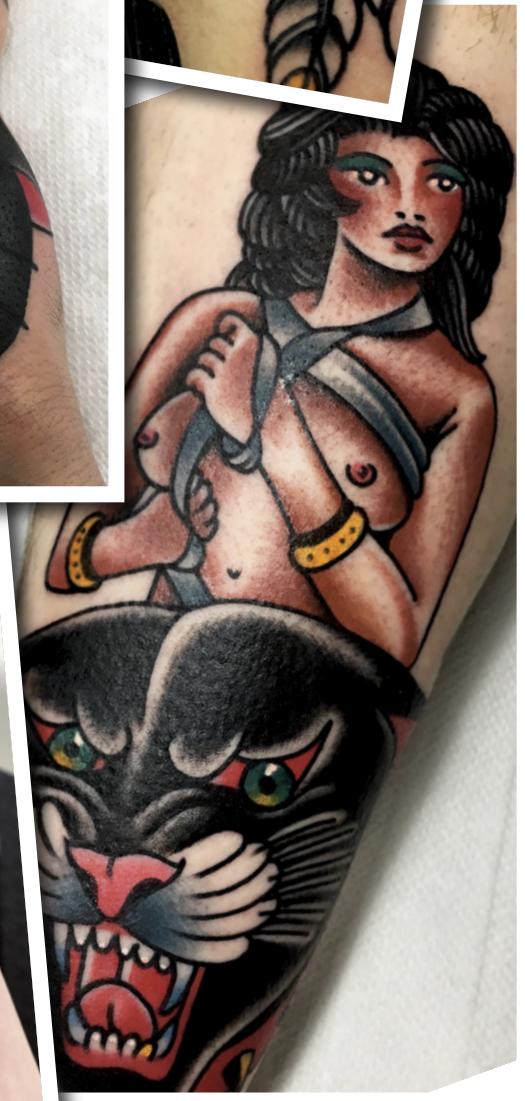
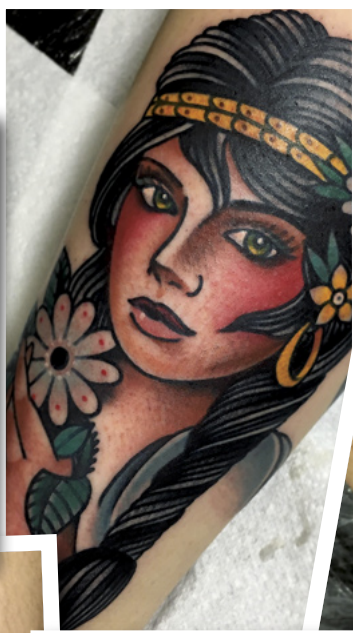
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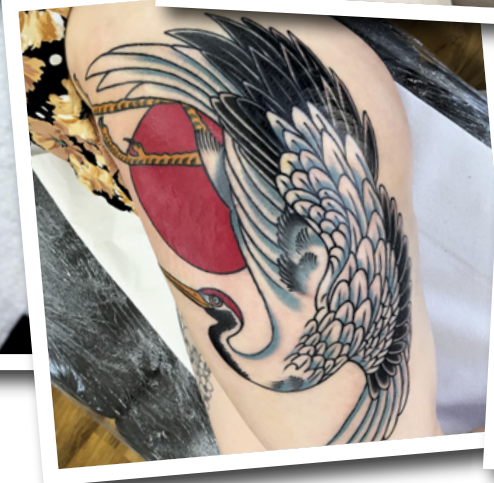
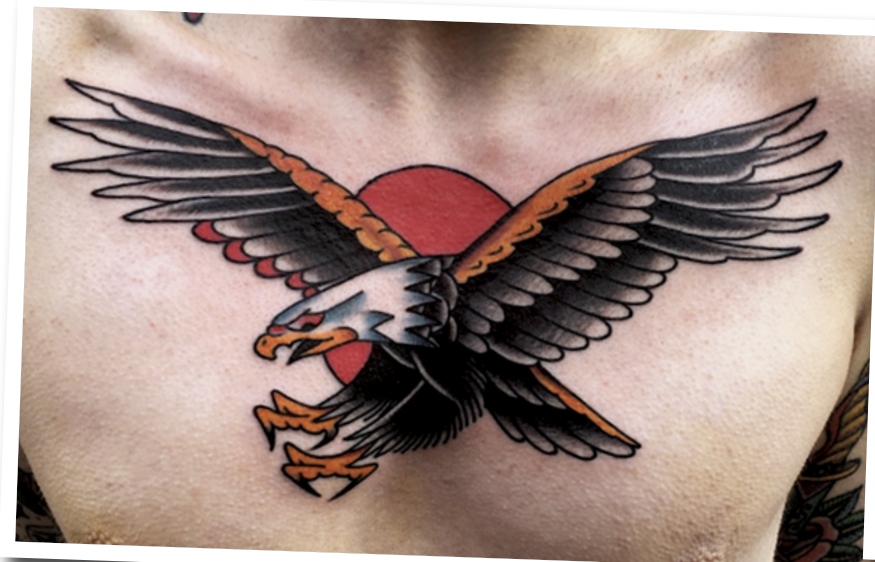
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TATTOO CO







MATTY ROUGHNECK

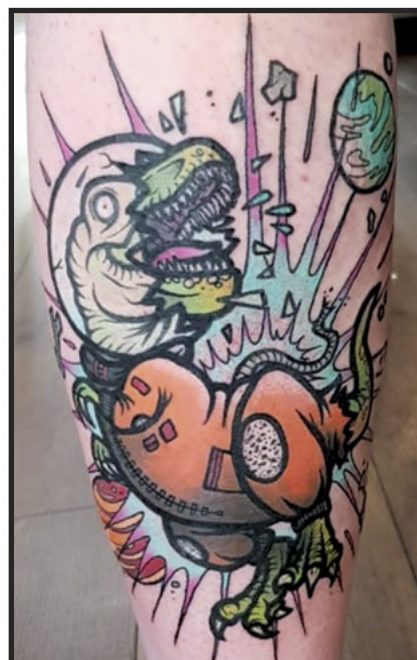
Matty Roughneck has only been tattooing for a couple of years. Despite this, he's quickly gained notoriety for his fun, comical designs that have a distinct illustrative element to them. As well as establishing himself as a tattooist, he is also in **The Roughneck Riot**, a band who describe themselves on Facebook as "fuelled by self-loathing and alcoholism" and "begrudgingly working on a new album which centres around the themes of nihilism, self-deprecation and a general hatred for the human race." Eager to learn more, we caught up with Matty to talk about punk, tattoos, and expensive mandolins...

Have you really only been tattooing for two years?

Yes, so I'm still pretty new to it obviously! I think I was very lucky. I got an apprenticeship through a tattooist friend who lived close by. It happened to be there when she was talking about hiring so I managed to get it! My training with her was about eight months, before moving on.

Have you always been interested in art?

I have, but I don't have any 'official' qualifications. I did art at high school and college, but I didn't enjoy the lessons. It felt like we never got to do anything we wanted to do, and if we brought in something we'd done at home, it wasn't edgy or good enough, so we'd all end up with stuff that was ruined! I had the choice of going into music or art, and by then I was in a band which was already touring, so I chose the music route. I didn't think about picking up art properly again until I got the opportunity to do the tattoo apprenticeship. After that, I spent every evening drawing and making sure I could do it. I guess it's paid off!





That discipline is admirable...

I just think that if there's something you want to do, you will do whatever to get to it. Even if you're living in the bin for a year because you've got no money, if you've got that goal at the end you'll work for it.

We live in a society where people expect things for nothing.

Definitely. A lot of people don't want to try, or problem-solve. They've got this idea in their head and they refuse to budge. A bit like tattooing – the whole 'I only do this style' mentality, which can lead to all sorts of tensions in studios...

You've got a very distinctive style though. Is that always how you've drawn?

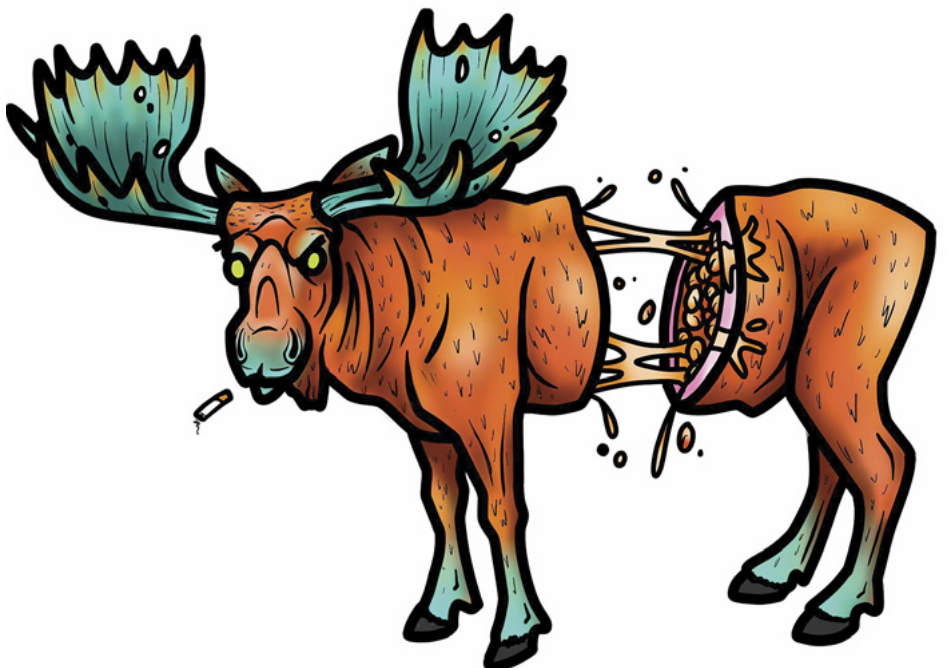
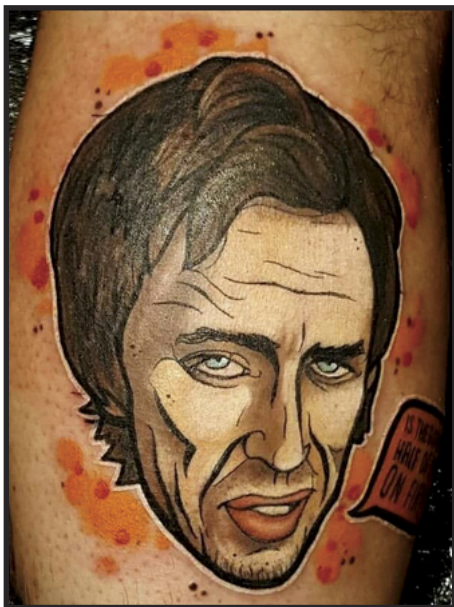
I've definitely learnt a lot since picking up a machine and I've had to change a lot of things, but I've always drawn in a cartoon and stylised way. When I first started, I think most people assumed I wouldn't be able to tattoo in that way because the lines were so fat. It's been difficult, but I've got to a good point with it. Once you learn the techniques, you're able to do your own thing. Personally, I'm blown away by people who can do photo-realistic stuff on the skin. People told me I had a very unique style, but it's just how I set about designing.

I think people see a style emerging in what an artist does, sometimes before the artist themselves sees it.

I just see it as my attempt to draw something normally! I didn't deliberately set out to find a style. I think I just saw a lot of things that I liked, that weren't necessarily tattoos, more art and design, but I noticed nobody was really tattooing them. I couldn't understand why people might not want them – like big, fat stickers! I know it's not for everyone, I see a lot of people giving me weird looks at my booth at conventions!

Do you think all tattoos should be fun? Is tattooing as serious a pursuit as some artists make out?

As long as you're being professional in your approach (with hygiene and so on), then I don't think tattooing should be taken as seriously as some people make it out to be. If it stops being fun, you end up working in a 'job' and getting stressed. I'm lucky at Bold Street because there are fewer walk-ins than at my previous studio, so I'm booked up doing the style I do. It's great, although I know that it's important to try your hand at other things and broaden your scope. But a lot of people get stuck in a rut doing whatever comes in the door and not having the artistic freedom to develop.





Are people starting to recognise your work and come to you specifically?

Yeah, it's really strange! I've been getting messages from people in America asking when I'm coming over! I'm like, 'How do you even know who I am?!'

Tattoo fans in America take the business of tattooing very seriously. They'll think nothing of travelling a considerable distance to meet their chosen artist. In England, we're maybe a bit more lazy!

In England, someone could be up the road and they'll want to know when you're doing a guest spot...

Are you influenced by any other artists' work?

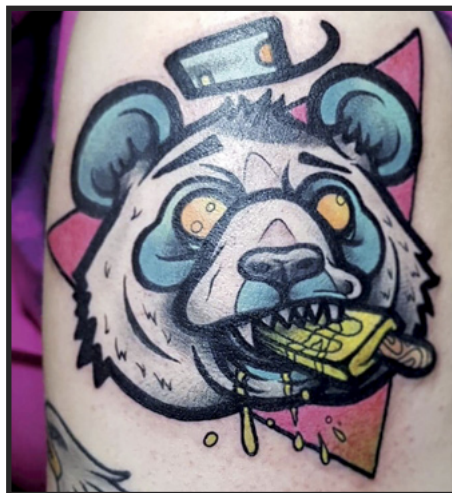
It's odd, but it feels like I don't know any tattooists properly! People ask me a lot about whether I like this guy or that guy's work, but there are so many tattooists now, it's very difficult to be aware of everyone. Since working with guys like Paul Terry, I definitely feel more influenced in my technique and composition. I really like Matt Kerley (Big Trouble Tattoo, San Diego); he was someone I noticed for sure. And I also like what Josh Peacock is doing; it's got a great look to it. I love the colour palette that Little Andy uses; I remember looking at his work and suddenly realising that so much use of colour is truly possible. I think you get told by others about things you 'can't' and 'shouldn't' do, but when you see other artists breaking those rules, it reaffirms your own ideas.

What else inspires you?

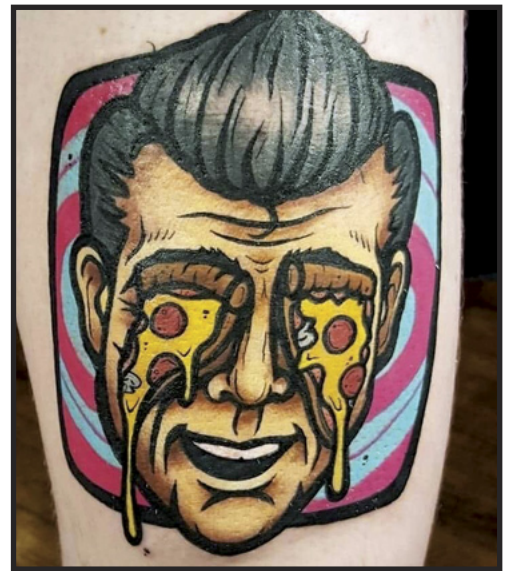
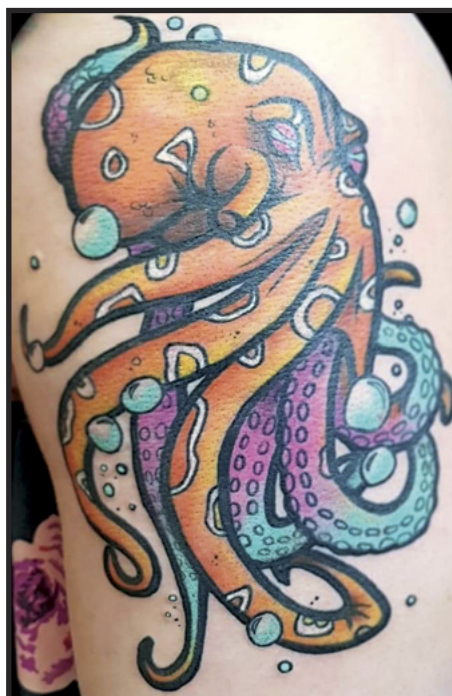
I've always liked the old-style comic books and their illustrations. Everything is drawn in a more realistic way, but they have line work incorporated too – fat black lines and shadows. It's always appealed to me to mix that element with bright colours.

Do you only do small-scale pieces?

Yeah. I haven't yet tried to do a massive piece,



as I'm not sure that just scaling something up would work that well with my style. I think my designs would be need to be adapted. I've done sleeves of smaller pieces and the end result looks like a sticker bomb, which works well and looks cool. I'd like to do more of that.



As well as tattooing, you play in a band...

Yes, I play mandolin.

How long have you done that?

Almost fifteen years. I'm twenty nine next week, but I feel a lot older... We started when I was fifteen, in school. We did OK, so we decided to stick with it and not quit. I put everything into it and it's still going OK! People know who we are, we're still touring, and we've toured worldwide. We don't play to nobody at gigs either, so even though it's hard work, it's worth it.

Does the music scene feel saturated – like the tattoo scene sometimes does?

Yeah, but although there's a lot of people doing it, it's very supportive; we invite each other on tours, share contacts, that kind of thing. Especially in the DIY punk scene, everyone is very encouraging – playing music, promoting bands, organising gigs. It's not competitive and there's not a huge amount of money to be made in DIY punk, so I think that's why nobody is fighting for that fame thing.





It sounds fun, but is there a downside?

It's a lot harder work than it looks. And once you've done a couple of tours, you realise that 95% of your time is spent waiting – mostly sitting down and waiting for flights or buses. 3% of it is spent carrying heavy things. And only about 1% of it is spent shouting and sweating on stage! Then it's back to driving all day and waiting! It can be mentally draining at times. You do get used to sleeping anywhere, even if you wonder why you're doing it to yourself. There's a lot of free beer on tours, but I don't even like beer that much...

So why do you do it?

I know there's a reason... I just can't think of it right now... No, to be honest, just being on stage and playing to people makes it so worthwhile. I've made so many friends through the scene, even people that I've only met recently or seen once or twice a year – you feel like you've always known them and that you've got a good, safe community. It's also great to just shout at people! Let it go and know that they're essentially paying you for it!

Did you become aware of tattooing through the punk scene?

Kind of. I'd been wanting to do it for a very long time, but I didn't think I would ever be able to. Back then you just assumed it was impossible to get an apprenticeship – they were so rare – and that even if you did, you wouldn't be learning much or doing anything particularly good. I met my mate Cherub, who I did the apprenticeship with, through the band.

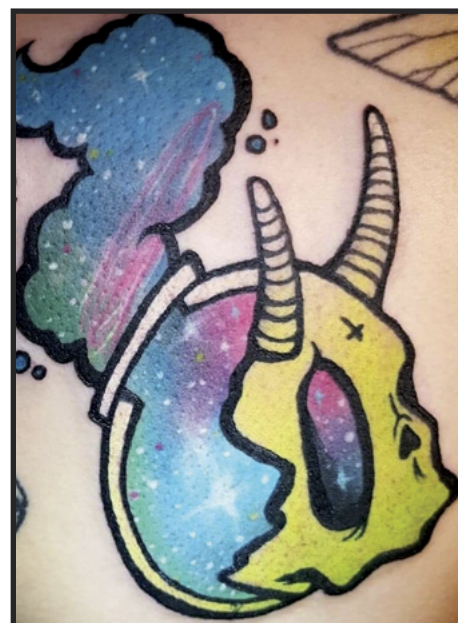
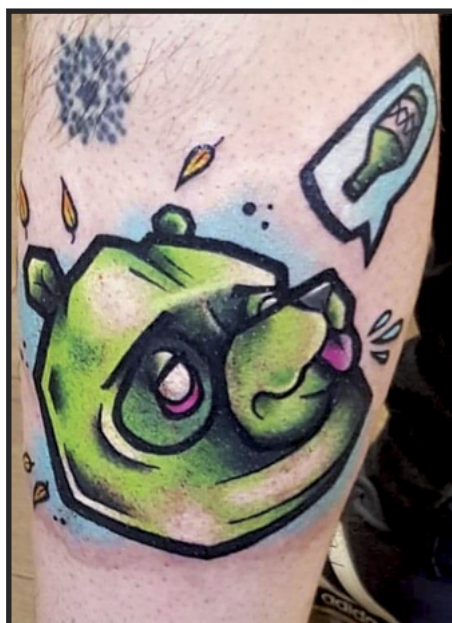


When you first started, what were your expectations?

I expected to find lining really really fucking hard... and I do! Going from pens to a tattoo machine was so strange. I really had to focus. And I still have doubts. I mean, I know I'm not so bad that I'm ruining people's skin, but I always look at my work and think about how I can improve. Shading and colour came much more easily. I'd been told about the difficulties of putting in bright and light colours, but personally I've not had those problems. I've learnt not to have any expectations, but simply to deal with things as they come along..

What do you think about the tattoo community?

Pretty much everyone I've met is really nice. But I do think there seems to be a split between the people who want to build the community and the people who want to keep things to themselves. I understand there's a business side to it; there's more tattooists and therefore more competition. I'm glad people get on as a whole though. I don't think I could handle it if there was bitchiness all the time! I like the fact that most people get excited about each other's work instead of frowning and saying, 'Hmm, it's a bit shit!' It seems that people want to learn from each other and inspire each other.





It hasn't always been like that...

I tattooed a guy that I'd been to school with, who'd apprenticed at another local shop. He was asking me about some techniques and I was telling him. He said that his boss wouldn't tell him anything, that he would only drip bits of knowledge down so he didn't learn too quick and fuck off! I think that's so strange – and potentially damaging to someone's motivation and creativity. Even if you went through a shitty apprenticeship yourself, why would you put someone else through that? I feel really lucky in my training, and then coming to Bold Street. Danny has a really good attitude; he's happy as long as you're happy. Everyone is really blooming and thriving from it.

It's great to be in an environment that sparks your creativity.

Definitely. The 'do this my way' method isn't effective. Everyone develops their own thing.

Have you done many guest spots or conventions?

I've done one, at Minerva Lodge in Chester. It snuck right up on me, and I don't think I was as prepared as I could have been. That's another thing, I always feel like I'm embarrassing myself for some reason, and that nagging feeling is something I'm working on to manage, but not to lose, or else I won't be able to progress. I think you need to be able to push yourself. I've done a few conventions. They're fun – a bit like festivals in a way! I've been warned that I'll hate them after a few years...

What machines do you use?

Mainly rotaries. I go between different machines. At the moment, I'm using an Ego and I really love that. I use coils too, but I really prefer rotaries.



If your possessions were in danger and you could only save your mandolin or your tattoo equipment, which would you choose?

My tattoo equipment! I've broken too many mandolins, they don't keep going long enough. The most expensive one I had was from the 1920s and it was just beautiful. Unfortunately it went on tour and blew up! The body was too old and it just split! The cheap ones wouldn't break if you threw them under a bus, but they sound shit, like you're playing cheese wire...

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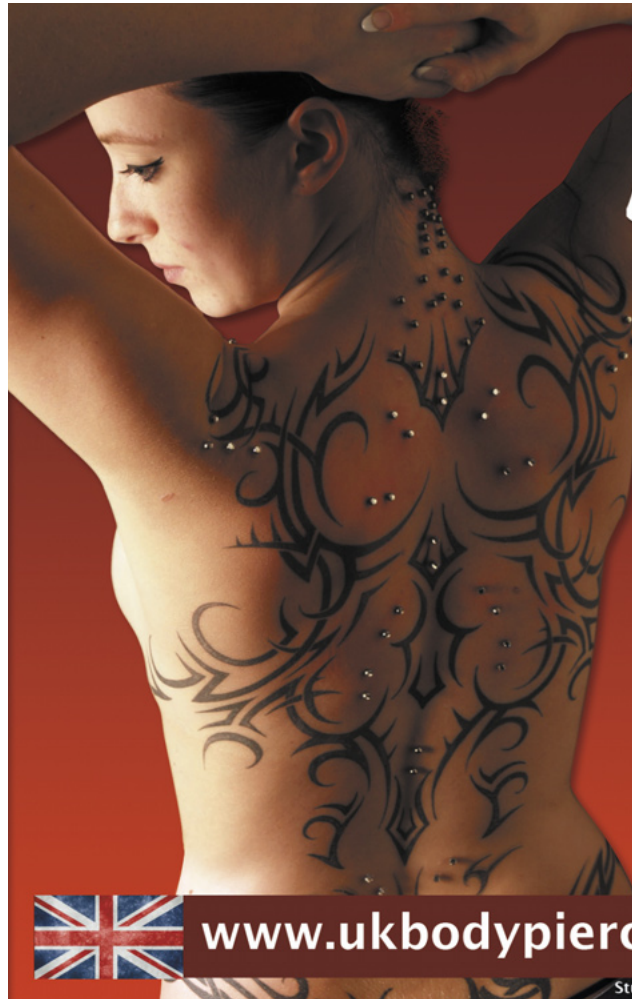


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DIRK-BORIS ON...

Cleaning up tattooing

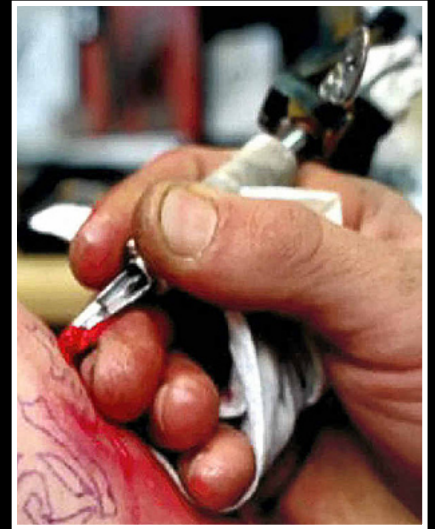
Here we are in 2018 and I'm writing about standards of hygiene!! Are you kidding me? Surely that's a worry from days gone by? But no. I still see tattoo artists at conventions and in so-called professional studios whose hygiene standards aren't much better than those in a Russian jail in the 1970s.

Sure, you no longer see artists working without disposable gloves. But it seems to me there's a lot of tattooists out there who don't really know what those gloves are actually for. It's not uncommon to see them adjusting their headphones, pushing their glasses back up their nose, or fiddling with the levers on their chairs while wearing them. And if the things they touch are not protected with fresh cling film, they will be contaminated with whatever happens to be on the gloves – germs, in other words, that could then end up in the next customer's bloodstream. Surely avoiding such cross-contamination is the very first lesson any tattooist needs to learn? A botched tattoo is annoying, but an infection such as hepatitis is a bit more than just "annoying". It could be life-threatening.

But still there are tattooists who don't seem to give a shit about their customers' health – or their own, for that matter. Here's an example of the latter. The tattoo is finished, the tattooist wore gloves, and everything he touched was either disposable or wrapped up and protected. So far so good. Then he cleans up and wipes over the tattoo with a piece of wet kitchen roll – without his gloves on! (Next time you're at a convention, take a look at all the different artists cleaning their customers' tattoos before the competitions, and you'll see this happening dozens of times.) Imagine, if the customer has hepatitis and the tattooist has a little scratch somewhere on his hands... well that's enough for an infection to be transmitted.

And of course a tattooist could well have smears and traces of god-knows-what on his skin – ink, blood, whatever – which will get passed to all and sundry when he shakes hands or touches any nearby surface. Disgusting, right? And what about the bastards (yes, bastards) who still scrub their grips in the washbasin, contaminating the entire area? Or those who refill ink caps direct from the bottle allowing the nozzle to make contact with the cap? (Yes, I've seen that too.) I could go on. But I'd rather not. Seriously, I'm stunned by the unhygienic practices that I see at some conventions and studios.

These artists, who should know better, are discrediting the whole profession. My message to clients is: If you're not 100% certain that your chosen tattooist is doing things right, go elsewhere. And if you're a tattooist and you see such things happening at a convention, let the organisers know. It wouldn't take much to have the authorities come down on us like a ton of bricks. Lapses in hygiene are potentially harmful not only to customers and individual tattooists; the consequences could be devastating for the industry too.



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CONVENTION CALENDAR

UK CONVENTIONS

19th-21st October

Midlands Tattoo Industry Show

Athena Leicester, Athena, Queen Street
LE1 1QD Leicester
www.midlandstattooindustryshow.co.uk

26th - 28th October

Jurassic Coast

Premier Inn Hotel Bournemouth Central
Westover Rd, Bournemouth,
Dorset BH1 2BZ,
www.facebook.com/jurassiccoasttattooconvention/

27th-28th October

Cambridge International Tattoo Convention

Guildhall Place, 1-6 Corn Exchange St,
Cambridge, CB2 3QF
www.facebook.com/cambridgetattoocon

27th-28th October

Halloween Tattoo Bash

Wolverhampton Racecourse
Gorsebrook Rd
Wolverhampton WV6 0PE
www.halloweentattoobash.co.uk

11th - 12th November

East Coast Tattoo Expo

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

2019

23rd-24th February

Brighton Tattoo Convention,

Brighton Centre, Kings Road,
Brighton, BN1 2GR
www.brightontattoo.com

6th-7th April

Portsmouth Tattoo Fest

Portsmouth Pyramids Centre
Clarence Esplanade,
Portsmouth PO5 3ST
www.tattooofest.co.uk

7th April

Ink & Iron

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

20th April

Maidstone Tattoo Extravaganza

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

27th -28th April

The Big North Tattoo Show

Metro radio Arena
Arena Way, Newcastle Upon Tyne
www.bignorthtattooshow.co.uk

26th-28th April

World Tattoo Festival

Eikon Exhibition Centre,
Balmoral Park,
Lisburn, UK
www.worldtattoofestival.com

3rd-5th May

Liverpool Tattoo Convention,

Britannia Adelphi Hotel,
Ranelagh Street, Liverpool,
www.liverpooltattooconvention.com

OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

5th-7th October

Florence Tattoo Convention

Fortezza Da Basso, Florence, Italy
www.florenceconvention.com

November 2nd-4th

Amsterdam Tattoo Convention

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

November 9th-11th

Brussels Tattoo Convention

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

11th-14th October

Paradise Tattoo Gathering

Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort
37 Corey Rd
Hancock, MA 01237
United States
www.paradisetattooconvention.com

13th-14th October

5th Balkan Thessaloniki

Tattoo Convention

Block 33 - Creative Space 26is Oktovriou 33,
Thessaloniki 546 27, Greece
www.thessalonikitattooconvention.gr

25-27 October

Nordic Ink Festival

Arena Nord, Harald Nielsen Plads,
Frederikshavn, Denmark
www.inkfestival.dk

3rd-4th November

St Etienne

Palais des Spectacles 31 Boulevard Jules Janin,
42100 Saint-Étienne, France
www.facebook.com/tattoo.convention

2019

18th-20th January

Goa Tattoo Festival

Tito's Pub, Baga, Goa, India
www.facebook.com/goatattooofestival

15-17 February

Mondial du Tatuage

Parc de la Villette
211, avenue Jean Jaurès
75019 Paris
www.mondialdutatuage.com

9th-10th March

Rotterdam Builders

Tattoo Convention
Maassilo, Maashaven Zuidzijde 1-2, 3081 AE
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
www.unitedconventions.com

15-17 February

6th Intl. Tattoo Expo Maastricht

MECC Maastricht
Forum 100
6229 GV Maastricht
Netherlands
www.tattooexpo.eu

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Instagram:
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www.northsidetattoo.co.uk

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Sunderland. SRI 1RH
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Contact through Facebook:
triplesixstudios666

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Instagram @blacklantern_tattoos-
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Instagram: @electric.kicks.crew

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www.nigelkurt.com

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I LOVE TATTOOING BUT IT'S *DESTROYING* THE PLANET

Seventy percent of the world's plants and animals live in forests, but they are rapidly losing their habitats to deforestation, and this loss of habitat can lead to species extinction. The forests of Borneo, for example, are amongst the most biologically diverse habitats on Earth, home to populations of species such as orangutans, clouded leopards and pygmy elephants. Just 100 years ago most of Borneo was covered in forest, but today it is down to less than 50%, and it is predicted to drop to as low as 24% by 2020. Logging operations, which provide the world's wood and paper products, are one of the largest contributors to deforestation, and many pulp and paper products come from regions where less sustainable practices are common, such as Borneo. With forest coverage rapidly declining, it is clear that there is a risk that hundreds of species could become extinct. Every day, tattoo artists all over the world are contributing to deforestation and the destruction of many animals' habitats, by using unsustainable, disposable paper products such as paper towels and couch roll.

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