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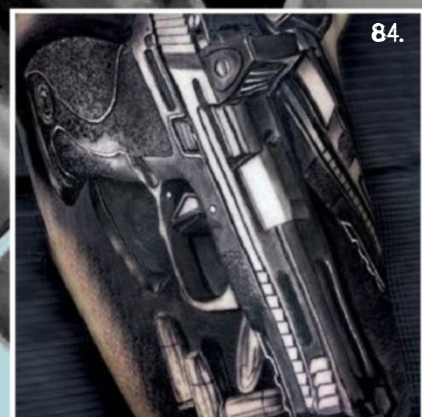
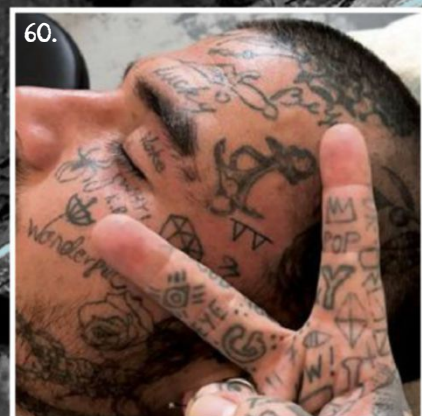
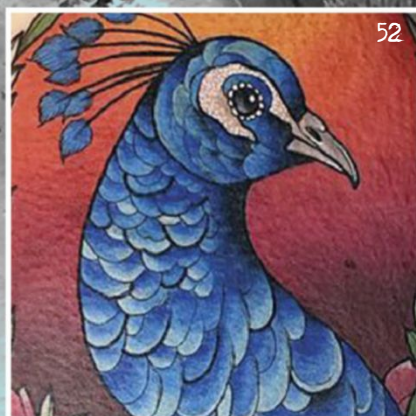
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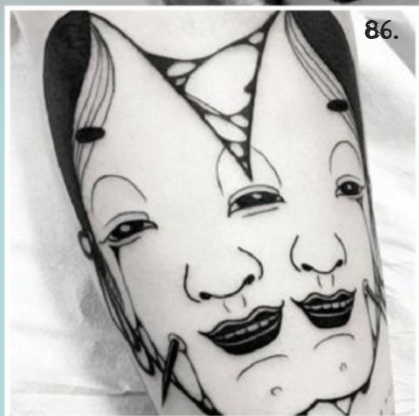
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WELCOME TO ISSUE 173



7 EDITORIAL

The future is an educated guess

8 NEWS

All the news that's fit to print

14 MARIO BARTH

Possibly the most famous name in tattooing

22 FLORENCE TATTOO CONVENTION

A friendly convention in the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance

28 JEROEN FRANKEN

The much anticipated book of tribal delights

34 CLAN OF TUSK

Brilliance on the streets of Brugge

44 A TATTOO TRIP TO BORNEO

The dying traditions of the Iban tribes

52 GALLERY

An international selection of tattoo treats

60 PRISON STYLE TATTOOS

The rebels' rebel breaks free!

66 INKY JOE'S ASIAN TOUR

On the road with Joe Hill

74 WILLY MARTIN MARTINEZ

Neo-trad from a traditional artist

82 PORTFOLIOS

Johann Salzinger
Miguel Bohigues - V Tattoo

86 OSCAR HOVE

The man behind the masks

94 REGIONAL DIRECTORY

Find quality studios near you

98 CONVENTION CALENDAR

Getting out and about

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WELCOME to 173

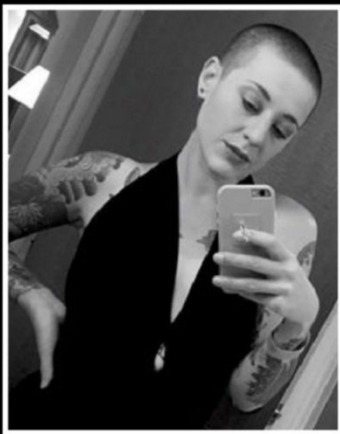
Life is busy, isn't it? Sometimes it seems there just aren't enough hours in the day to achieve that elusive Instagram-worthy lifestyle. Cue all those product designers who are inventing gadgets to make our chores more carefree!

From clothes-folding boards and compartmentalised laundry baskets to phone sanitisers and on-the-go lunch cookers, we can now buy a device that will take care of pretty much any everyday task for us. Some inventions have obviously made people's lives much, much easier. But others... well you only have to look at the cat shit that our friend's robot vacuum cleaner smeared all over his living room carpet (after fending off the romantic advances of his tortoise) to wonder where this is all headed.

Have you seen the Disney film 'Fantasia'? In one of the scenes, 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', Mickey Mouse tries to enchant a broom to do the chores he has been given. But the broom gets out of control, multiplies, and ends up flooding the wizard's den. I think this is a great metaphor. By trying to cut corners, we're often creating more work in the long run. And maybe we're also in danger of depriving ourselves of something very important. Sure, we're shaving ten minutes off our day, but what about that real sense of achievement you get when you finish a job, look back at it, and feel good about it? Or, as I call it, the satisfaction of Getting Shit Done.

Aside from digital drawing and pre-made needles (which many would argue make tattooing quicker, not necessarily easier), there haven't been too many advances in tattooing tech. And I think that's quite a good thing. Although it's time-consuming, there's something ritualistic and meaningful about thoroughly setting up your station, tuning a coil machine or scrubbing your tubes. There have been a few much-hyped experiments with robot tattooers, but would they ever do as good a job? Would that tattooing magic still be there? And tattooists, would you feel the same satisfaction if you could simply program something to tattoo for you? Would your work be anywhere near as enjoyable?

I'd like to know what you think about modern time-saving gadgets. (Someone on the Total Tattoo team has already told me they love their clothes-folding board...) But please make your communications short and to the point, because I've got to manually empty my cat's litter tray and vacuum my living room. And my dinner won't cook itself.



Lizzy
Editorial Team
editor@totaltattoo.co.uk

**"Time flies like an arrow;
fruit flies like a banana."**
— Anthony G. Oettinger

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

R.I.P. Bill Salmon



We were deeply saddened to learn of the death of tattoo legend Bill Salmon at the age of 68.

Born on the East Coast of America, Bill went to live in San Francisco in the 1970s. With his wife Junii, he owned and managed Diamond Club Tattoo, one of the most respected studios on the West Coast.

Bill came into tattooing through the great Ed Hardy. Here's how he related his story in 2016: "I basically came to California in 1973 without a mark on my body. By '74, I was living in San Francisco and getting tattooed by Lyle [Tuttle] and other local people and then I met Ed Hardy. But I didn't really start tattooing then. The Queen Mary Tattoo Expo in '82 is what got me into it. Ed Hardy said to me, 'You know, you're running out of space, you should go in for it.' I did an apprenticeship on Broadway in San Francisco with Dean Dennis, whose brother had got into some kind of accident, so it was an immediate opening. I had already been drawing flash, so I had a little bit of ammunition to present, and then it was a quick apprenticeship. In the old days you were an apprentice one day and the next day you're the artist. You got promoted quick. It all depended on who stuck around and who left! I got some quick promotions, and went to work at Realistic on the other side of town... I'm 33 years tattooing and I'm looking forward to the next 33!"

From the beginning of his career until his untimely death, Bill was passionate about the world of tattooing. He can quite rightly be described as a tattoo visionary, and he made a major contribution to the modern renaissance of the art form. Widely respected in the industry, he was generous with his knowledge and advice, judged at prestigious shows around the world, and worked alongside many of the great names. His enthusiasm and ebullient energy were inspirational, and his sense of humour was very much in evidence in his own utterly unique body suit – a collection of original elements that included many puns on his own name.

Bill was a true diamond, and our thoughts are with his family and friends at this sad time.



INKING OUTSIDE THE BOX



OK, it had to happen. The tattoo 'Bird Box' challenge. We've just been watching an online video of a tattooist in Brazil (and his willing client) doing the blindfold thing, as inspired by the recent Netflix horror film in which Sandra Bullock's character has to make a perilous blindfolded journey.



'Bird Box' has been one of the streaming site's biggest successes, and now the internet is rapidly filling up with everyone's videos of their own blindfold stunts, some more disastrous than others. This blindfolded tattooist and his client are having a great laugh about the whole thing – they're certainly having more fun than poor Sandra Bullock did in the film – and the final result is so faint and scribbly it will be easy to cover up should the recipient so wish. But come on, is it really worth the risk? 'Bird Box' challengers might love the unpredictability of the art that's created, and the wild gamble involved, but we reckon if you can't see what you're doing you really don't really want to be messing around with blood and needles.



TATTOO TEA PARTY TICKETS TO WIN!

It's that time of year again... The Tattoo Tea Party is back! And after we got snowed in and missed it last year, we can't wait to get there this time! Once again, Event City Manchester will be the venue for a convention that's fun for all the family. Want to be there too? We've got some tickets to give away! To be in with a chance of winning, just email us the answer to this question:

Why didn't the Total Tattoo Crew make it to the 2018 Tattoo Tea Party?

- 1) **They were snowed in**
- 2) **They were washing their hair**
- 3) **They were helping with Brexit negotiations**

Email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with TEA PARTY as the subject line, to arrive no later than Friday the 22nd of February. The first correct answers drawn out of the Total Tattoo office teapot will win. Usual terms and conditions apply (see page 4/5).



GREAT SCOTT!



Our celebrity news antennae recently picked up this awesome story about Michael J. Fox. At the age of 57, the 'Back To The Future' actor has reportedly acquired his very first tattoo – a beautifully executed image of a sea turtle which, according to press interviews and social media comments, has immense personal significance for him. The thing we love about the story is the way the star paid for his tattoo... with authentic personally-signed movie props. Tattooist Mr K and Keith McCurdy of Bang Bang NYC (a studio frequented by many A-list celebrities) are now the proud owners of an original 'Back To The Future' hoverboard and iconic self-lacing sneakers!



HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?

A couple of issues ago we featured a news story about Brighton police officer Lee Willis, who had decided to get a tattoo of a rather embarrassing sketch of a suspect that he drew way back in 2004 at the start of his career. Based on eye-witness reports at a crime scene, the sketch was so bad it became a long-standing joke between him and his workmates that obviously wasn't ever going to go away, so he decided he might as well get the image permanently inked on to his body (in aid of charity of course!) Well that tattoo is now a reality, thanks to tattooist Lee Robertson at the Sideshow Tattoo Company in Hove who said it was one of the weirder tattoo requests of his career. The fundraising effort for mental health charity Mind is ongoing, and you can still donate via

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/lee-willis6

www.justgiving.com/mind



SECOND CHANCE INK

Those coming out of prison face many challenges in rebuilding their lives. Yes, they've committed a crime, but they've done the time and they sometimes just need a second chance to make good. The local authority in South Bend, Indiana, in the United States, clearly recognises this. They recently voted to overturn a long-outdated ordinance that prevented anyone who had been in prison from getting a license to own, or work in, a tattoo shop. The existence of the ordinance only came to light when a tattooist from out of the area applied to open a premises in South Bend and found out that he couldn't. He brought the matter to the attention of the council, who set the wheels in motion to correct the injustice in the system. And local tattoo shop owners are certainly pleased, because it will mean they now have a larger pool of talent from which to hire artists!



MAKE AN EXHIBITION OF YOURSELF

If you're a resident (or former resident) of the US state of Minnesota, and you're reading this, you might want to get in touch with the Morrison County Historical Society. They're organising an ambitious and fascinating exhibition entitled 'The Story Behind the Tat: Tattoo Art in Central Minnesota' and they're asking anyone with ink, and a story they'd like to share, to contact them. It doesn't matter if your tattoo is large or small, an impressive piece of art or just a reminder of something that's special to you, if there's a tale to tell, give the Society a call on +1 (320) 632-4007 or email mocohistory@gmail.com and they will arrange for you to come to the Charles A Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum to be photographed and talk about your ink. BUT HURRY! They have asked people to contact them by 14th February. Check out www.morrisoncountyhistory.org/?p=7012



ROOM SERVICE

Taking the boutique hotel experience to a whole new level (and, it has to be said, jumping on the tattoo bandwagon in a very enterprising way), the Jupiter Hotel in Portland, Oregon, USA, is offering its guests a unique accommodation package... which includes a tattoo. They've teamed up with local studio Jackalope Custom Tattoo to offer guests a complementary tattoo from a range of pre-drawn designs, or money off a custom piece. A bucket of beer is also included, and they're calling it the Ink & Drink Package. As they say, "Got the itch for ink? We'll help you scratch it, Portland style." Check out www.jupiterhotel.com/ink-n-drink-package for more details.



R.I.P. Don Nolan



The sad news of the passing of another great tattooist, Don Nolan, reached us just as we were going to print.

With a tattoo career stretching over sixty years, Don was seen by many to be way ahead of his time; paradoxically, he was also considered to be an unsung hero of traditional tattooing.

Born by the sea in Connecticut, the colours and energy of the ocean were a constant inspiration in Don's art. He was also a keen sailor, and circumnavigated the globe four times. Don was artistic as a child (there's a lovely story about him, as a schoolboy, painting Jesus wearing sunglasses because – as he said – that's what He would have done, had they been available at the time) and painting remained a passion his entire life. He was also a sought-after airbrusher and pinstriper, and built model ships too. Greatly inspired by Japanese tattooing, he leaves behind a substantial legacy of flash as well as the extraordinarily beautiful bodysuits (and other tattoo work) for which he became so well known. He had tattoo shops across the USA, including Hawaii and Alaska, and opened the ACME Tattoo Company in St Paul, Minnesota, in 1988.

Here's how Don described how he saw his art: "Man has continually sought ways in which to express his individuality. Perhaps the oldest form of this expression is found in the ancient art of tattooing, an art form that, when practiced by the professional, can be as beautiful and personal as one could desire."

Don was a kind, generous, humble man. With his customers, he was gentle and self-assured, instantly putting them at their ease. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this sad time.



TUNING IN

The Total Tattoo news radar has picked up an interesting story from Tunisia. This is a country where tattooing of all kinds has long been frowned upon and suppressed, and the contemporary tattoo scene has until recently been forced to exist almost entirely underground. But official attitudes seem to be shifting. Tattooist and campaigner Fawez Zahmoul, whose studio was the first to be legalised when Tunisia introduced new legislation in 2016, has now opened the country's very first state-sanctioned tattoo school – and is training both men and women to practise the art safely and professionally. The school is purported to be the first in the whole of North Africa and the Arab world too.

WIN SCOTTISH TATTOO CONVENTION TICKETS!

The Scottish Tattoo Convention in Edinburgh is one of the most keenly anticipated shows of the year. The only major tattoo event in bonny Scotland, it showcases the best that is on offer from across the UK and beyond. Expect top class tattooing, a friendly atmosphere and all-round fun. We've got two pairs of tickets to give away to Total Tattoo readers. To be in with a chance of winning entry to the show for yourself and a friend, just email us the answer to this question:

Which one of these would you traditionally expect to see worn with a kilt?

- 1) Merkin
- 2) Sporrán
- 3) Fanny pack

Email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk with SCOTLAND as the subject line, to arrive no later than Friday 22nd February. The first correct answers drawn out of our tartan tam o'shanter will win. Usual terms and conditions apply (see page 4/5).



BLEEDING DRY

We've picked up a worrying news story from Thiruvananthapuram, in Kerala, southern India, about a shortage of blood donations in the city. Apparently hospitals in the area aren't getting the supplies they need because so many of the younger generation, who would previously have donated a large percentage of the blood, are now unable to donate due to their recent tattoos and piercings. The city has a burgeoning tattoo scene, but there are no proper health inspections for tattoo shops and inadequate hygiene standards mean there is a high risk of infection with bloodborne pathogens. The blood banks are therefore having to turn away large numbers of potential donors because there is no guarantee their blood will be safe.



MAJOR EXHIBITION COMES TO SCOTLAND

The major exhibition 'TATTOO: British Tattoo Art Revealed' has now arrived in Scotland! You can catch it at Rozelle House in Ayr until Sunday 3rd March.

Curated by the National Maritime Museum Cornwall (NMMC), it's the largest gathering of tattoo-related objects and artworks ever assembled in the UK. It features many items from private collections that are not normally on public display, including photographs and archival material that reveal fascinating hidden histories (such as the eye-opening story of Britain's pioneering female tattooist, Jessie Knight). The exhibition also features the striking '100 Hands Project' curated by Alice Snape – one hundred lifelike silicone arms tattooed with original designs by some of the UK's leading tattoo artists. And there will be live tattooing too! Sean Cahill and Gordon Killin of The Petal Faced Gypsy Tattoo Studio in Prestwick will be showcasing their skills in a studio space that has been specially built to accompany the exhibition.



The exhibition includes major contemporary art commissions from three tattoo artists working in very different tattoo styles. Each artist has created a unique design on a hyper-realistic body sculpture which speaks to the historic artefacts and artworks around it. Tihoti Faara Barff's work celebrates the modern revival of Tahitian tattooing; Matt Houston's commission is a heroic tribute to the sailor tattoo; and Aimée Cornwell's piece addresses the breaking down of artistic boundaries.

If you haven't yet seen 'TATTOO: British Tattoo Art Revealed', don't miss it. Full-price adult tickets cost £7, with £5 tickets available for concessions and young people. Entry is free for the under-12s. Tickets are available on the door at Rozelle House (Monument Road, Ayr; KA7 4NQ, tel 01292 445447) or from the Ayr Gaiety Theatre box office (tel 01292 288235).



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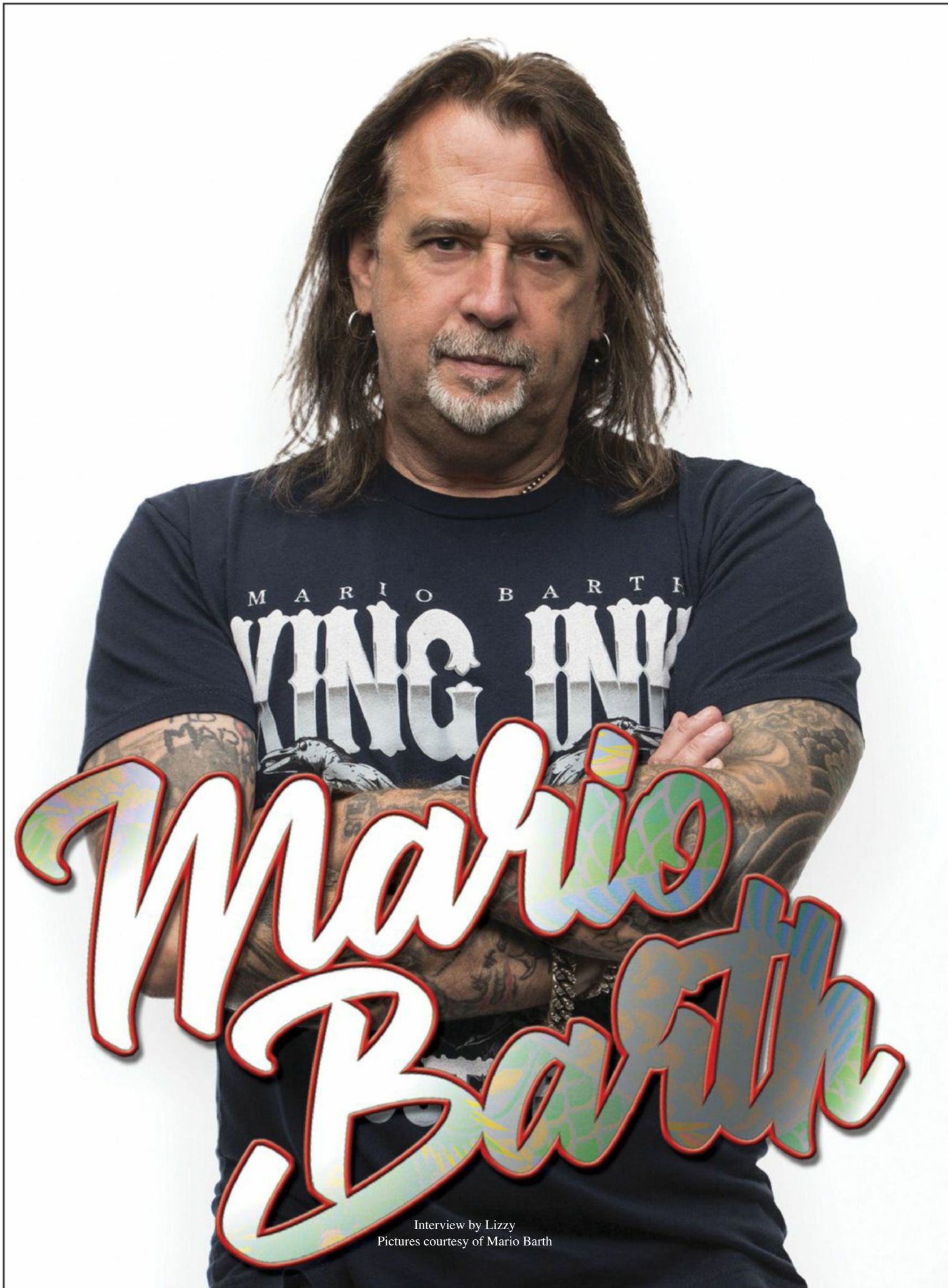
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Interview by Lizzy
Pictures courtesy of Mario Barth



Mario Barth needs no introduction. From humble beginnings in Austria, he's become an industry leader and one of the most well-known names in tattooing. His Intenze brand of ink can be seen in studios all around the world, and in 2011 he co-founded the international Coalition for Tattoo Safety (CTS) whose mission is to bring tattooing together with a unified voice to establish common sense industry guidelines. We grabbed some time with Mario at the CTS's recent World Tattoo Industry Trade Show in Las Vegas.

Mario has been tattooing for more than thirty years. "It's a beautiful time right now," he tells us. "There are so many new people coming up – so much new talent – and with information so freely available on the internet, some of them are better in six months than most people will ever be in their entire careers. It's unbelievable."

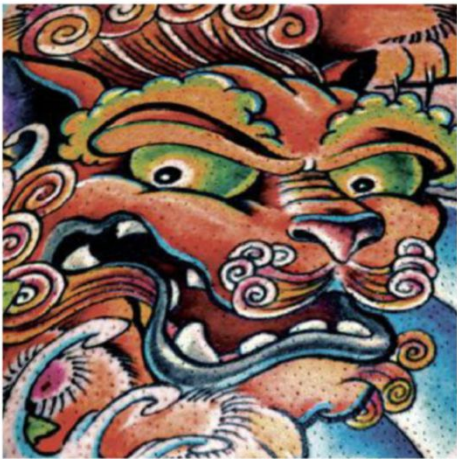
Mario is passionate about tattoo education and the sharing of information. "In our industry,

it's very difficult to be an advocate for education," he admits, "but it's something I've always fought for. Personally, I've always believed in being free with my information. If somebody has a question that's important enough to ask, then it must be important enough for me to answer. When someone seeks knowledge and you withhold it from them, you're actually encouraging regression. And that's what has been happening in the last ten, twenty years or so. There's this hole that's

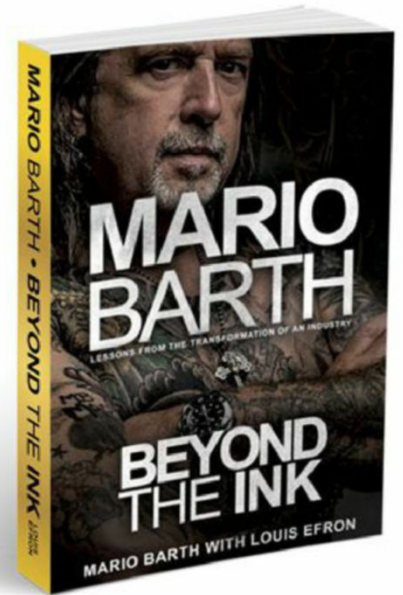
been created. The 'old school' system is still in place and although the 'new school' system is coming in, there's no values being transferred any more. The new artists are just gonna do what they think is right. It's almost like you're missing a piece of the timeline. And when we miss the opportunity to educate upcoming artists, what's going to happen in another ten, twenty years from now?"

"You hear people say, 'Oh, the youth has no respect.' But that's because you didn't teach them respect in the first place! In one of my seminars recently, somebody mentioned scratchers. I hate that word 'scratcher'. I don't get why we can't call them 'aspiring tattoo artists.' When did they become scratchers? I mean, I was a scratcher too. Nobody falls out of the womb knowing how to tattoo! You have to learn. We've got to quit calling them scratchers. It's degrading. They're just trying to make a living and create art for people who are willing to receive tattoos."





“I believe tattooing is first and foremost a craft,” Mario continues. “People may disagree with me, but it is. And it’s a craft that has to be learnt. The training should include knowledge of bloodborne pathogens, hygiene, cleanliness, sterile techniques and so on, as well as how to use a machine properly. Then you can bring the artistry in. The challenge is that most people in tattooing want to bring the artistry in first, and *then* start understanding how important the safety measures are. Personally I believe tattoo education and training should be certified and standardised across the board. And that this should be done by the industry itself, not by people from outside tattooing who don’t know how tattoo artists operate. If regulation comes from outside the industry, artistic freedoms could be restricted. Tattooing has deep underground roots, and I think a lot of people in legislative and regulatory roles don’t understand the importance of that.”



“It’s the biggest risk our industry is facing today,” Mario says emphatically. “And the problem – which is the same as it has always been – is that we cannot get together and speak with one voice. I always make an analogy with the Battle of the Alamo. The Alamo only fell because one wall got breached. It’s the same with tattooing. If we can’t hold a strong, unified position, the authorities will breach our walls and take control. Because if an industry can’t regulate itself, and can’t establish its own guidelines, they come in and do it for you. And from that moment on, it’s out of your hands.”



This was the driving force behind the formation of the Coalition for Tattoo Safety (CTS), which Mario helped to found in 2011 and which recently hosted the pioneering World Tattoo Industry Trade Show in Las Vegas [see report in last month’s Total Tattoo Magazine]. “It started out as the Coalition for Tattoo Ink Safety,” Mario explains. “It was

unbelievably difficult, like pulling teeth, to get everybody to sit together in the same room. It took years. Everybody hated each other. Nobody wanted to be there. Half of them had lawsuits against each other! That's actually one of the biggest problems in this industry. Nobody wants to collaborate with anybody else. But there was a moment when we kinda made a 'metaphorical deal' to leave our egos (and businesses) outside the room and it suddenly started working."

"We started to see that we needed to advocate safety and professionalism in other areas of our industry too," Mario continues, "so we broke the whole thing down into groups. These segments within the CTS make it much more effective and mean everyone has a voice. We have incredible meetings. We've had various sessions involving a total of more than fifty different suppliers and manufacturers. At one meeting, no less than twelve pigment producers got together. Some sessions are open to the public, others are closed because what's being talked about is commercially sensitive – like specific formulations, new motors, or the implications of cartridges being classified as medical devices for instance. And we've just had 260 students training for two very full days. Basically we're creating and putting in place good, measurable standards for professional tattooing."



We ask Mario for his view on the changing convention scene, especially with regard to supply companies. "I come from that era when if you wanted to buy products at a tattoo convention the suppliers would be in a separate, closed-off room," he tells us. "But you can't have those kinds of restrictions anymore, because you can get the equipment everywhere now. You're better off showcasing the equipment correctly and taking time to educate the consumer, so people can come in, visit your booth, ask questions and make good decisions about which products to buy – just like at any other industry trade show."



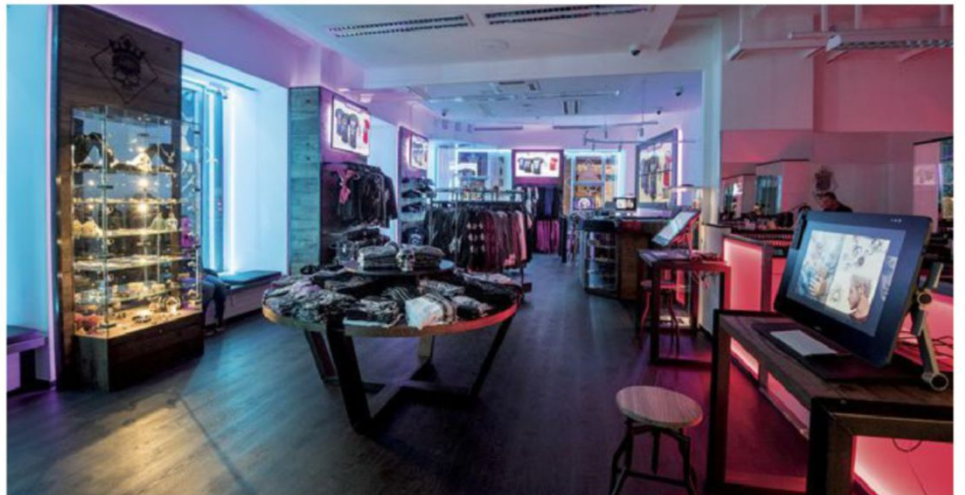


We talk about the strong 'look' of Intenze products. Clearly, a lot of thought goes into the aesthetics of their design. Mario tells me it's all about communicating the value of the brand. "If you want to be in business, you need to have pride in your company and pride in your products. The exhibit floor at the World Tattoo Industry Trade Show was way better than you'd see at any regular convention. We've raised the bar. And next time it's going to be outta control! People need to be able to look at these products and say, Wow! *This* is tattooing? They need to understand that there's value behind it."

"Likewise, people often frown upon tattooists who make a lot of money and have a nice car or a big house to prove it. But we shouldn't punish people who want to show off their wealth. It's OK to show that you are successful and be proud of what you do. The industry should embrace it. The problems come when people think this tarnishes tattooing somehow. I'm the only person in tattooing who has been on the cover of a mainstream corporate magazine. And I've had write-ups in Forbes. There are so many people who don't grasp what that really means for tattooing."

"But my life runs on 'emotional payment.' That's the big motivator for me," Mario says. "I've never had a huge regard for money. I'd much rather just see people happy and fulfilling their dreams. People forget that money is just a by-product invented by society to put a value on things – a different kind of value to the value you place on your family and kids. We invented it as a thing to strive for. We ran out of stuff to trade with, so we printed paper, stuck faces on it, and said it was worth something. But I like to help people. That's huge payment for me."

Which of Mario's many achievements has made him feel the most proud? "The proudest moment of my life was the birth of my son," he tells us. "But I'm also immensely proud of the recognition and respect I've achieved for – and within – the tattoo industry. At the World Tattoo Industry Trade Show, one of the traders (who is a longtime friend) came up to me and said, 'You know, this is incredible. Years ago you told me about a dream. Today was the day I saw it!' That was huge for me, emotionally. It took me right back to the time when all of this was just a vision, a crazy idea."



We ask Mario if he sees himself as a risk-taker. "Every day is a risk for me!" he replies. "In fact I don't really think about 'risks' anymore. I never have really. I'm a very unconventional businessman. Most people would devise a plan, decide on a budget, then come up with a strategy to achieve their goal. I don't do that. Someone once described my way of doing things as 'Mario putting on a blindfold, going out on to the diving board and just jumping off – and figuring out if there's water in the pool when he's already on the way down!' I just follow my dreams and visions and figure things out later. So literally every day I'm risking everything because I'm dancing so close to the fire. And I have been burned, several times. But it gives me this feeling of adrenaline, of 'this could all be gone tomorrow.' I know that if something goes wrong, it could change our whole industry. That's the biggest risk with what I'm doing right now."



With so many irons in that metaphorical fire, what does Mario's typical working day look like? "I work seven days a week, sometimes up to twenty hours a day. I work, sleep, then do the same thing all over again. When I wake up, I never think, 'Ugh, I have to start my day...'. Instead, I just get up and wonder what the day will bring. The first thing I do is check my email and look at all the tattoos being done in my shops, going through them, checking them out, and giving my comments if I have to. That's my morning newspaper! Then I work in my office until noon. I tattoo in the afternoon, and hang out until midnight. After that, I'll go back home and check my emails and the tattoos again – because I have shops overseas, so everything from Europe will have arrived by then."



Mario tells us that tattooing is an important part of his intense daily schedule. "None of what I do feels like 'work,' but tattooing is the escape that I need to balance things out. It's like my vacation. My whole body is focused on the tattoo I'm doing, and time flies by. When you're doing business stuff, you have to think differently. You have to think strategically. But when you're tattooing you're exploring artistic avenues instead. I like that separation. I wish sometimes that I could have real days off where I just did nothing, but I don't think I'd be able to do that. There's always something going on. I'm always thinking, or figuring something out. Even if I'm exhausted when I go to bed, I can't stop thinking about my products, figuring out how they should look or how they should be presented. That comes from my artist's mind as well."



So how on earth does Mario do it? The game-changer for him was an inspirational encounter with life coach Anthony Robbins. "I was doing a tattoo show in New Jersey in 2002," he recalls, "and I'd been told that the following weekend there was this guy – Tony Robbins – who would be coming in to do a four-day event. I knew his name from books I'd read, so I decided to get hold of a ticket. That was the start of maybe the biggest transformation in my life. Within two years, I'd taken my own business from the six hundred thousand dollar level to being a twenty million dollar organization. That was definitely Tony's influence. No doubt about it. He makes you understand that, whatever you want to be, the decision is really yours. Nobody else's. And the only way to succeed in anything you do is to tap into yourself. Be true to yourself. You know, you can always tell if somebody is being true to themselves – when they're being sincere, or whether they're just telling a story. We have those receptors in our body. It's called a gut feeling for a reason! Of course it's much more difficult to use those instincts when you're texting or emailing, because the body language is removed. You can't sense the other person in the same way."





Many years earlier, before Mario's encounter with Tony Robbins, there was another person who had an immense influence on the course of his life. "Back in the 80s, in Austria, I was tattooing out of my house. This was normal. There weren't any tattoo studios in the country. Then I travelled to the United States and visited Florida. That was where I saw a tattoo studio for the very first time. It was called American Tattoo and it was owned by Sailor Bill Johnson. The tattoo studios in Europe that I knew about had a bit of a reputation – with all the tattooists fighting each other, the firebombings, and so on – so I was afraid to just walk in and talk to the guy in case I got into a brawl! But Sailor Bill Johnson sat me down and we talked for two or three hours. He was just so open about everything, and he gave me so much information, even telling me all about his equipment and how he tattooed."

"That meeting changed my life," Mario continues. "I came back to Austria and within six months I had my own shop. It was the first legal tattoo shop in the country. I painted it so that it looked almost exactly like American Tattoo, only it didn't say 'Sailor Bill Johnson' on the front. It said MARIO BARTH." Mario laughs. "I've been successful in my life, and I've worked hard for it. Nothing's been gifted to me. I've worked from the bottom up. And I'm so lucky to have been able to play a part in changing the tattoo industry for the better."

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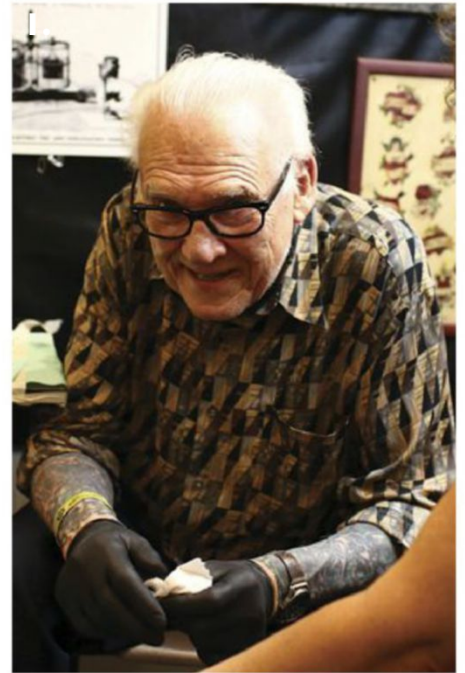
FLORENCE TATTOO CONVENTION

A tattoo convention in a top tourist destination. Always an attractive proposition!

Florence, the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance, is a treasure house of art and culture. Its museums and galleries are home to such familiar masterpieces as Michelangelo's *David* and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and its historic centre is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visitors who make their way up to the Piazzale Michelangelo are rewarded with a spectacular panoramic view across the terracotta roofs and domes of the city... and there were some stunning visual treats in store for visitors to the Florence Tattoo Convention too.

The convention was in the Fortezza da Basso, a fort built into the fourteenth century walls of the city, and the largest historical monument in Florence. This was the 11th edition of the show. Everyone who attended will have taken away some wonderful memories – many of them in ink! – because this is one of those shows that has a great sense of community. It's a real celebration of the tattoo scene. Tattoo legend Lyle Tuttle was a guest of honour, and a small cake was improvised to wish him a happy birthday, amidst a crowd of friends and admirers. Even Amsterdam's famous Hanky Panky was there!

The show hosted an exhibit by the Rome Tattoo Museum (romatattoo.com/en/) This is a relatively new museum – privately owned and financed – that aims to preserve, protect and present the whole story of tattooing, “from its magical, religious, or punitive meanings to its therapeutic or tribal ones”, including its most recent history too. As the museum's own website says, tattooists have often led “adventurous lives, with passion and a hint of madness”



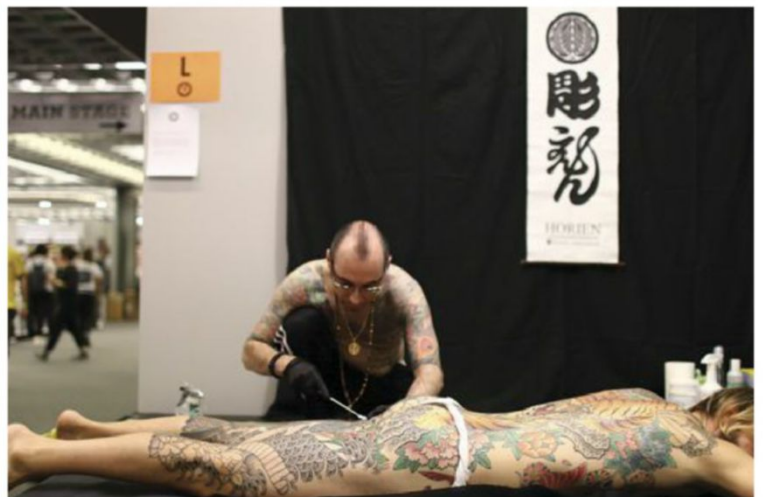


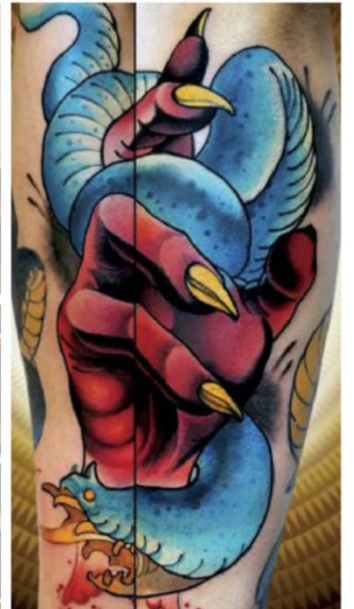


and the museum's collection includes imagery, ephemera and artefacts relating the life stories of those who embraced tattooing at a time when it was considered transgressive and socially unpalatable. Gian Maurizio Fercioni and Gippi Rondinella were special guests at the Florence convention.

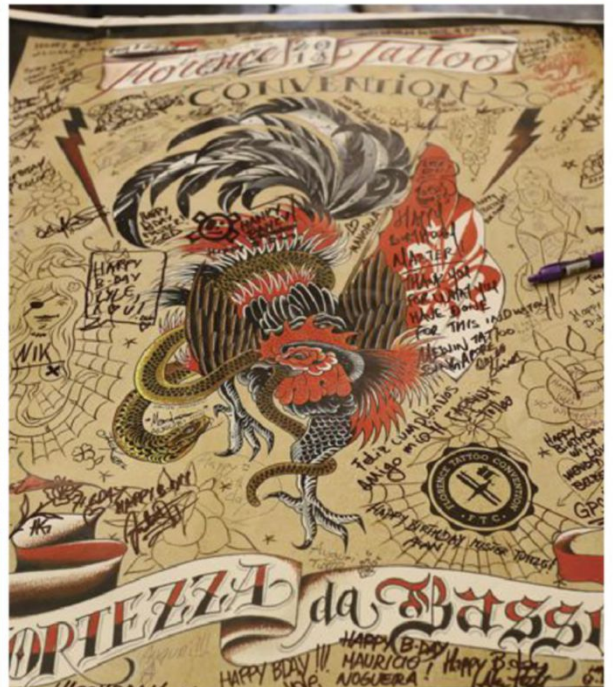
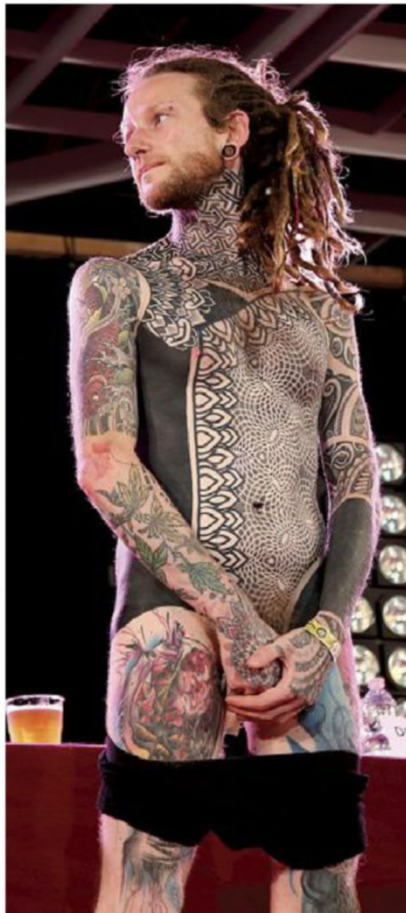
This spectacular three-day event incorporated a programme of quality entertainment too, with burlesque, body painting, comedy acts and music, including Sicilian rapper Frankie Hi-Nrg and members of US hip-hop supergroup La Coka Nostra.

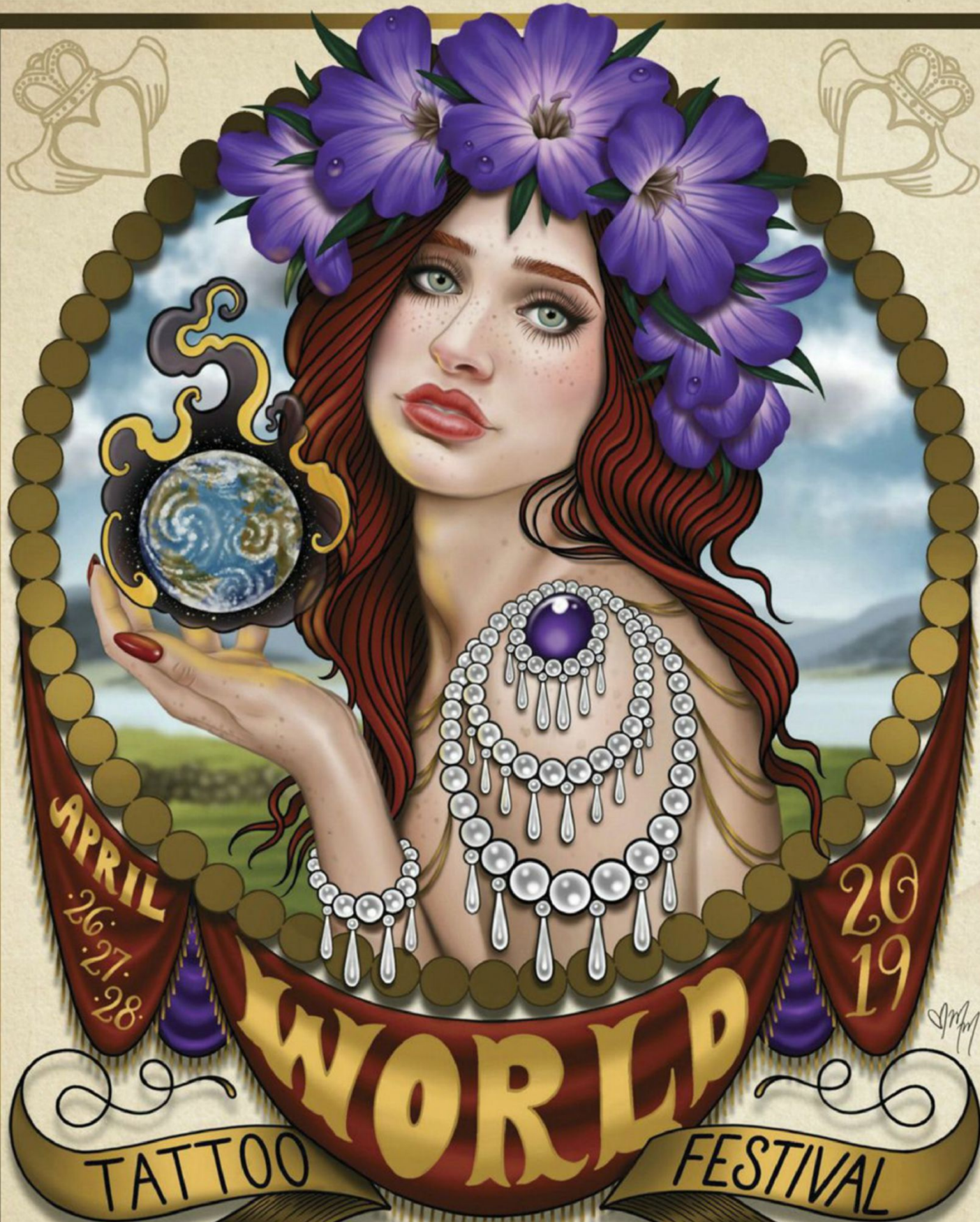
There was a beautiful traditional tattooing area, hosting such artists as Elle Mana Festin from the Philippines, Mexican Samuel Olman, Endra Folk from Indonesia, Matt Ajarn and Rung Arun from Thailand, Japanese artists Tomoia Akitsu and Kencho II, and last but not least Hawaiian Keone Nunes of the Sulu'ape family.





Competition winners were Maya Vavoom and Giuseppe Messina di Fronte del Porto (Traditional); Dmitry Babakhin and Gabry Scriba (Tribal); Rama Manfredotti and Alex Santucci (New Tribal); Alessandro Pellegrini and Andrea Tommasi (Oriental); Anton Tonik and Vittorio Mustacchio (Realistic); and Lorenzo Di Bonaventura and Carolina Caos Avalle (Other Styles). Anton Tonik also won Best of Day on the Sunday, and overall Best of Show was won by Carolina Caos Avalle with an amazing avant garde piece – a fitting reflection of the way that new tattoo trends were so much in evidence at this show.





NORTHERN IRELAND

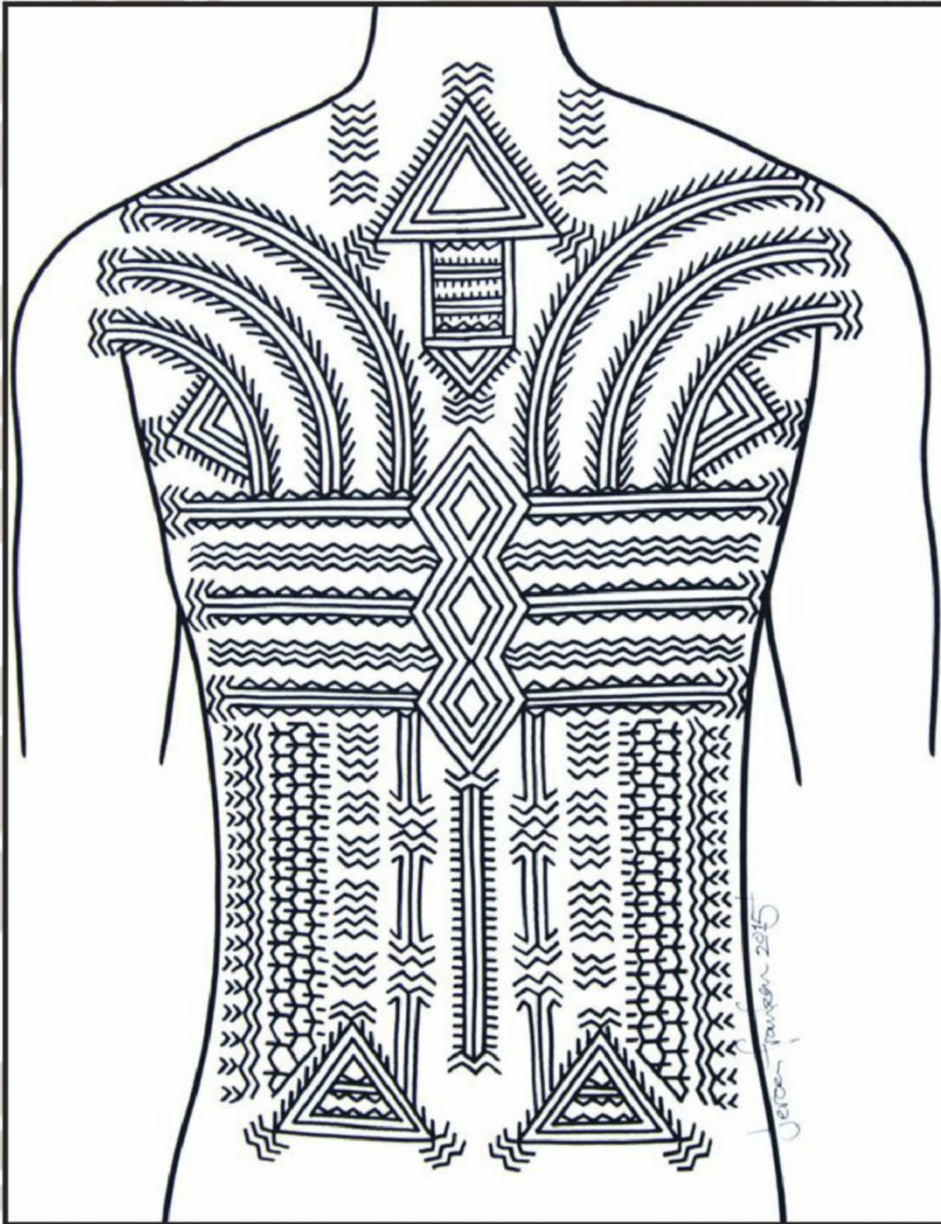
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JEROEN FRANKEN TRIBAL



Based in Eindhoven, in the Netherlands, 48 year-old Jeroen Franken has been tattooing professionally for more than twenty years. He apprenticed with the legendary Hanky Panky (Henk Schiffmacher) and soon developed a deep interest in tribal cultures and their traditional tattoos – in particular the Iban of Borneo. He is now a highly respected specialist in this field. Recently, Kintaro Publishing released his much-anticipated new book, a collection of hand-drawn designs in stark black-and-white “straight from the jungle of the artist’s mind” and entitled simply ‘Tribal’.



And then you discovered traditional tattoo designs...

Yes, but it wasn't until I picked up a magazine with pictures of Leo Zulueta's work that I started drawing similar patterns to what he was creating. After a few months I began to get curious about what it was I was actually drawing and I decided to find out more about the places where tribal and ethnic tattooing was being (or had been) practised. That's when I knew I needed to travel to those places – to see, feel, smell, listen... for the whole sensory experience. It's important to add that for me, the term 'ethnic' encompasses tattooing in the Western world too.

Before you began tattooing, did you have a practical interest in art?

Drawing has been part of my life since the first box of crayons I got when I was five years old. It evolved into an interest in the abstract, rather than the realistic, because I always thought it was better to capture a realistic image with a camera, rather than trying to draw it. Having said that, I do often find it very rewarding to draw something from life in order to figure out measurements and proportions, or just to prove a point to myself!

What was it that first attracted you to tattoos?

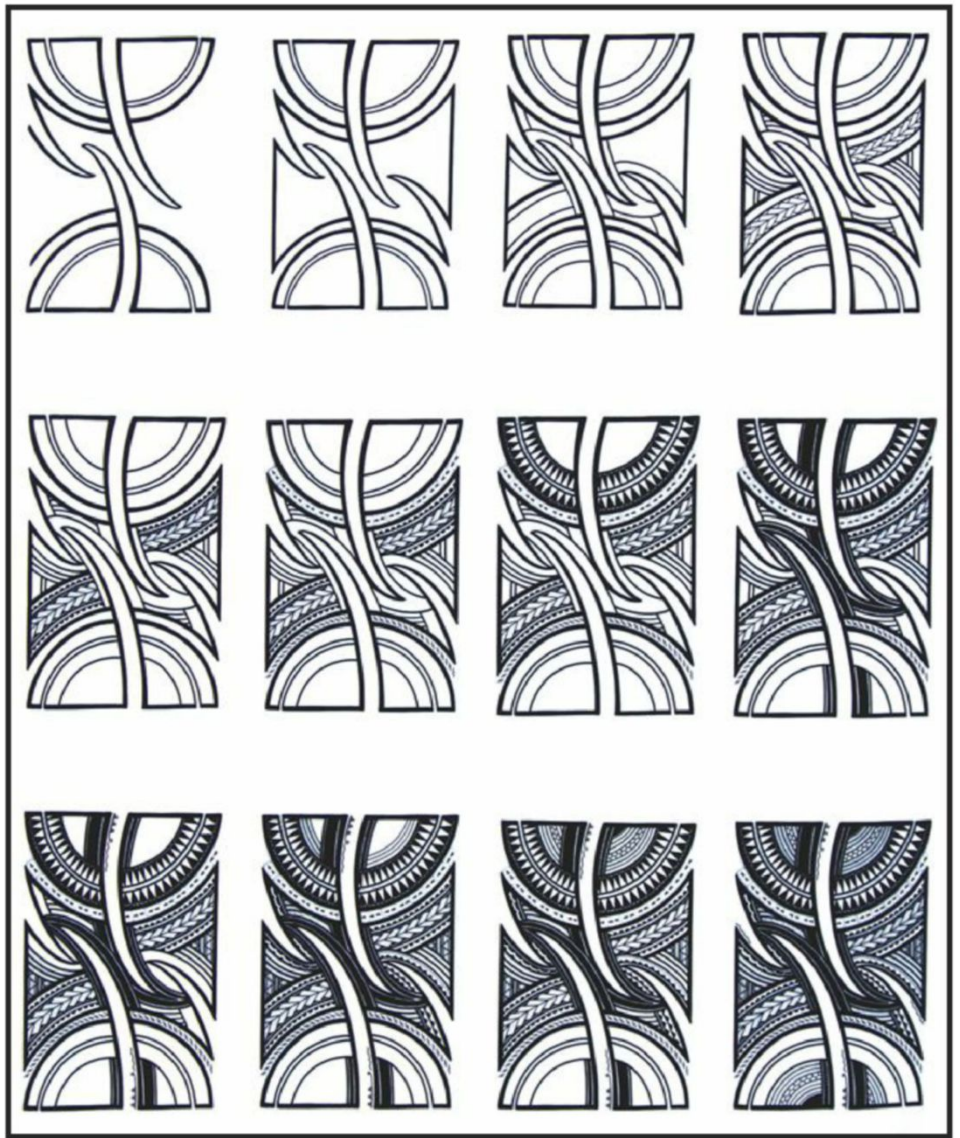
I saw my first tattoo when I was eleven years old. The guy wearing it was my best friend's mother's nephew. He was a very big guy – well over six foot tall, with a rough aura/energy, and the kind of voice that you get from smoking a lot of cigars and drinking a lot of whisky. He was almost terrifying, but that was somehow the attraction. It wasn't his actual tattoos that interested me at the time. It was the idea that you could put ink into the skin, and make a design. I was in awe of that.





When did you decide to learn to tattoo?

It was when I suddenly realised how few people were doing tattoos in styles that still had a direct visual link to what had been done in the past. There were tattooers copying patterns or doing their own thing with those designs, but not many of them had a real interest in the culture where the imagery had originated. They hadn't travelled there. Even in the Polynesian islands, practising tattooers were a rarity in the 1990s and early 2000s. And in Borneo, at the time



when I started visiting there, there was almost nobody pushing traditional tattoos. Only Robert Mayau in Kapit had a sheet of flash with Iban designs, but he rarely tattooed the style.

Why was it so important to you to learn about the cultures themselves in addition to being inspired by their tattoos?

First of all, I've always loved to travel and seek new experiences. And not knowing what I was actually drawing made me want to discover everything I could about these designs – because, as with all imagery, there is a lot of history behind them. It was this research that made it all come to life for me. I needed to see and feel the energy in these places. I needed to live with the people and discover exactly what it was they had taken out of their natural environment and abstracted into tattoo designs. It's amazing when you see the actual forms in nature that have been replicated in their imagery and stories.

So you began making research trips to Borneo...

Yes, and in fact it was during one of those early trips that I did my very first tattoo! I was sitting on the verandah (the *ruai*) of the longhouse, writing and drawing in my sketchbook. A young guy named Mari Adi came over and asked if he could see it. As he turned the pages, he kept coming back again and again to the same design, and he finally asked me if I could draw it on his arm. This was something I'd often done at home – on my own legs – when I'd been trying to figure out how patterns worked with the anatomy, so I said OK. He then asked me to tattoo it on him!





And did you...?

I didn't know how! He kept asking, and I kept saying no, and then he went to the other side of the *ruai* where some of his friends were sitting. A couple of them walked off, and came back a few minutes later with a Walkman, some electric wires, plywood and other bits, and in about an hour they'd made a rotary machine with needles leaping 3cm out of the tube (which was a Bic pen). "Here is your machine," Mari Adi told me.

What did you do then?

I smiled and declined the offer, at the same time admiring what they'd made and the effort that had gone into it. But one of Mari Adi's friends then took the machine and started tattooing him, going up and down, over and over, and making a terrible mess. Mari Adi looked at me again with pleading eyes and it was at that point I figured I should help him out as I was probably his best bet in the circumstances! And of course as soon as I started, a dozen other guys from the longhouse all wanted tattoos done too...

In your current work, do you prefer to tattoo by hand or using a machine?

Lately there has been an enormous revival of hand-tapping and hand-poked tattoos. For myself, though, I've never given much thought to using anything other than a tattoo machine. The way I figure it, they are so much more efficient and practical. I guess this comes from my early days at the original Hanky Panky's, surely one of the world's busiest walk-in shops at that time. We were doing dolphins and kanji and everything in between, so machine tattooing was the only practical method. If modern machine tattooing had existed four hundred years ago, I wonder if we'd still be doing hand-tattooing today? It's an interesting question. Having said that, though, if used correctly hand-tattooing methods do add to the feel of the tattoo. I remember when I was stretching for the late Paulo Sulu'ape, I noticed his system of using tattoo



combs of different sizes to achieve a perfect balance of shapes and proportions. It was a beautiful way to work. That's a good illustration of how special these hand-tattooing methods can be when properly mastered.



Tell us about your apprenticeship with Hanky Panky.

I only ended up asking Hanky Panky for an apprenticeship after two other shops had turned me down. A friend of mine, Captain Caveman, was already working there and someone we both knew told me I should go and ask. It felt like it was 'meant to be' because when I joined the shop there were three of us with a deep interest in ethnic and tribal tattoos, and this pushed us all ahead much faster than if we'd been working alone. Guests came from all over the world, and that helped tremendously too – tattooers like Inia Taylor, Paulo Sulu'ape and Gordon Toi. Working in that shop was an enormous and continuous high.

Which country or people has had the most impact on you?

The Iban of the Borneo jungles. Definitely. When I went there, it was the first time I'd



seen people in a natural environment tattooed from top to toe. And they were amazed at our interest, proud to share their culture, and intrigued to see a non-Iban wearing their tattoo designs. On one trip, I met an Iban who had never been to a city or seen a 'white man' before. He asked, "Where do these white Iban come from?" And many years later, Captain Caveman and myself were adopted by the *penghulu legan*, a chief of chiefs, as a big thank you for all our help, sharing, friendship, and, in their words, living just like them.

Human relationships transcend national boundaries...

Yes. I prefer a universal view of humankind – without boundaries. I believe that with an open mind one can understand and appreciate the specifics of other cultures even if they are very different to one's own upbringing. There's a small tribe in the Amazon, for example, whose members commit suicide when they

are in their 30s because they feel they cannot contribute in any useful way to society beyond that age...

Do you feel it's important to follow the traditional 'rules' of each tribal style?

The word 'traditional' is a difficult one to me. Traditions evolve and change. Details differ and shift through time. One culture can flow into another. The connection with the originating culture can be lost. And of course there are certain things that have a universal cultural significance. So where does that leave 'tradition'?

That's an interesting point. What is your view on the various efforts that are made to preserve ancient cultures?

I believe it's natural for things to evolve. Everything moves. Everything is energy. Energy

is God, and God is energy, if you will. Some things take millions of years to evolve or change; for other things, the time period is much shorter. And if something speeds up, there are forces that will slow it down, and vice versa. It's yin and yang. The balance is maintained. As to the question of whether it's important to preserve things as they are... My mum used to preserve homegrown foods in the summer so we could eat them in the winter. So yeah, if it suits a purpose it IS important to preserve. But the importance lies in what one does with what has been preserved.

Do you allow yourself freedom of expression in your tattoos?

I do give myself some freedom, but mostly in terms of layout and composition. I sometimes combine and create forms and shapes (inspired by nature or taken from non-tattoo sources) but only if they fit the design and complement the whole, and connect with the customer's story. Generally I aim for historical accuracy, but in my own style.

Tell us about your previous books.

The very first one wasn't really a book; it was more of a dissertation – my final year Graphic Design project on the Borneo Iban. There are just eleven copies in existence! I also created two editions of an accompanying volume; the first edition had an aluminium cover (I produced twenty copies of this) and the second edition had a plywood cover (I produced fifty copies). Shortly graduating I went to Borneo again, this time with a photographer friend, Sven Torfinn, and the material from that trip became my first proper book, 'Pantang Iban'. Then about five years ago, I got together with Andre from Kintaro Publishing to produce a volume of my



drawings from over the years, entitled 'Jeroen Franken'. Because we had so much material, this was swiftly followed by 'Borneo'. The new book, 'Tribal', is my third with Andre.

What made you decide to produce these books?

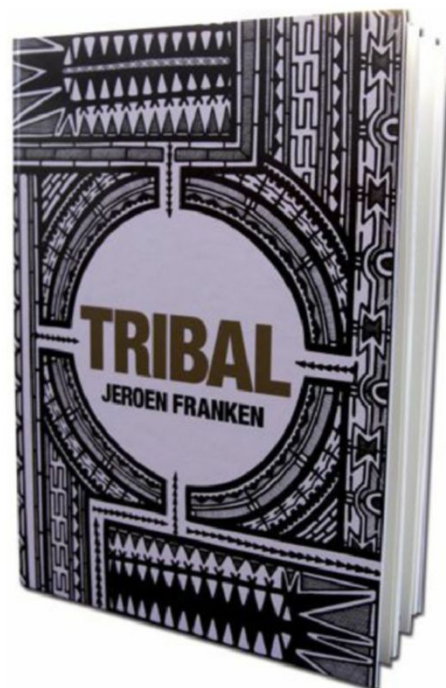
I just felt bad that all these drawings were stashed away, and I thought I might as well share them with people who were interested. Maybe people will use them for creative inspiration, maybe they will make people want to travel, maybe they will encourage further study and research... They're there for whatever people want to do with them!

Tell us more about the content of 'Tribal'.

The first part is from a sketchbook that I took along on a trip with my friend Bernie Shaw. At that time we were working at Inia Taylor's Moko Ink in Auckland, New Zealand. Bernie needed to go on a road trip to see some family and speak to some elders. He asked me to join him on the trip and I gladly accepted. He shared many stories with me on that journey, and in the book you will also find one of his drawings that he did in my sketchbook. Then there are some drawings that could easily be tattooed just as they are. These are just ideas that I put down on paper. Another series of drawings was made on a trip with Rob Deut in 2009. We visited Hawaii, Molokai, Tahiti, Rapa Nui and Nuku Hiva, and the drawings portray emotions and stories from those places. 'Tribal' also includes drawings inspired by my fondness for *tapa* or *hiapo* (whichever term you prefer).

How does designing for a book differ to designing for a client?

I'm not really involved in designing the books themselves (except for my project book from 1995). And their content is just drawings I have made along the way – on my journeys here, there and everywhere. For me, drawing is such a blessing. A meditation, if you will. I draw to create, to ease my mind, to study, to



look for different answers, and to have fun. When I am designing a tattoo it's different, because the customer has to be happy with what I have made for them. They are going to be wearing it for the rest of their life.

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CLAY OF MUSK TATTOOING



Interview by Perry
Pictures courtesy of Clan of Tusk



Len Leye and Ben Vervotte created Clan of Tusk in the picturesque Belgian city of Brugge around five years ago, and since then they have been producing ever more beautiful tattoos that sing with quality and class. We visited them recently, and in a relaxed and free-flowing conversation we talked about their shared love of skateboarding, the development of their tattooing, and how their close working relationship transcends the extreme contrast in their personalities.

Len has the kind of eye for detail – and the memory to go with it – that I would love to have. I asked him when he started tattooing and, in characteristic fashion, he instantly replied with an exact date. “20th December 1998. I will always remember that day because it was one of the most stressful and difficult of my entire life. The coil dropped out of my frame and I didn’t really know how to get it back in...”

Len is self-taught. He started out tattooing together with a good friend, Jon. “Jon knew some things, I knew some things, we got along OK, so we teamed up and shared our lack of knowledge. We were doing small, simple stuff, but neither of us ever found it simple.” In those days, the only way to learn how a machine was set up was to go and get a tattoo on a part of the body that you could see being tattooed – so you could watch it all happening and ask some sneaky questions. I asked Len if people still did this. “Sometimes, yes. And I really don’t mind. If I have a good connection with the client, I will answer their questions. After all, there is so much more to tattooing than just knowing one person’s set-up. Everybody does it differently. Some like fast-running machines, some slow... There isn’t just one ‘right’ way to do it.”





Len vividly remembers the first time he saw someone with tattoos. He was at art school, and one of the older students showed him his new ink. "I was totally blown away at how proud he was of that tattoo. He was so full of this amazing positive energy! Tattooing was so exciting back then. It was outside of the norm. Maybe it's gone a little too mainstream now? But there are both pros and cons to that I guess."

Len had always wanted his own shop; as nobody was offering him a position in theirs, he simply had no choice! He teamed up with Jon and together they opened a business which they ran together for about fifteen years. (Len then went on to open Clan of Tusk with Ben.) "The first two or three years were really tough. My parents sometimes had to help me with the rent. Tattoo shops in Belgium at that time were usually just one guy, because most tattooists wouldn't want to share their work with anyone else. But we had a plan that Jon would do any Polynesian-style or old school work that came in, and I would do any Oriental; the rest we would share. It was a good time to get into tattooing because it was just before it became really popular. The ball had started rolling, and people had begun to travel to get tattooed."

The early 'noughties' were a period that Len reflects on as a golden time for tattooing. "It really isn't the best time now. Back then, they were making far better tattoos. Tattoos that would stand the test of time. Paul Booth's early backpieces from all those years ago still look amazing today. He really knew about black and grey, and the ink is really put in. Sometimes I think we forget what a tattoo is. I totally respect the guys who do portraits or realism, but for me personally this isn't real tattooing. I believe tattoos need to be powerful and bold. You need good construction. It has to look like a tattoo. I love tattoos of every style, but it's all about power and energy."

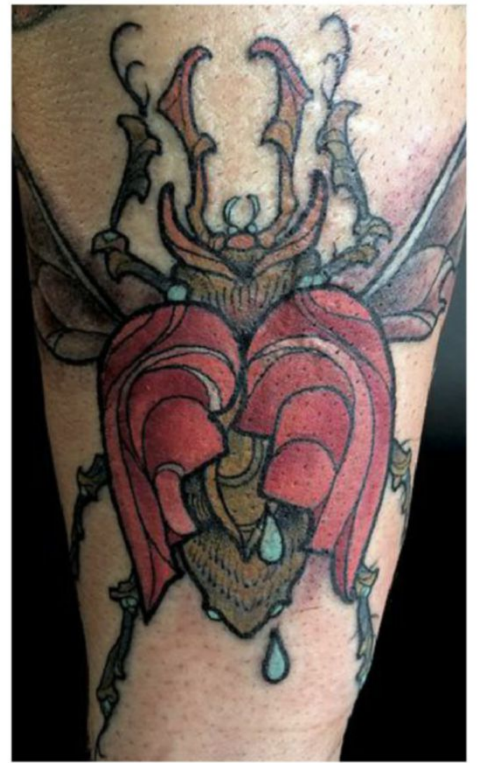
Len comments on how tattoo conventions have changed too, in ways that aren't always good. "There's too much of everything in tattooing now... and that includes too many conventions, and too much happening at those conventions. Music that's usually too loud. Lots of half-naked girls on ropes breathing fire. I still think conventions are a good thing but it depends on who organises them. I worked a lot of conventions early on in my career, but I stopped because the atmosphere totally changed - as of course one would expect it to, with each new generation. Instead, I prefer to do guest spots now, and hang out with the tattooists I admire. I get much more out of visiting studios and working alongside other artists in a more relaxed environment."

Looking back over Len's time in tattooing, the changes within the industry have been universal yet he remains philosophical. "There are obviously lots more shops now, but I believe everyone has the right to tattoo. There used to be a time when people were looking for quality; the quality is still there, but I think people are no longer so focused on getting the best work they can. Maybe I'm just getting old, but I don't really understand the more naïve styles. But I guess it's just that same desire for the rebellious. I remember getting tattooed at Into You in 1989 when Duncan X was working on the desk. His tattoos have inspired a generation. His work looks so simple, but it's actually not. He really lived those designs. It's important to have that passion."

"Artists that I look up to include Regino Gonzales, Troy Denning, Mike Rubendall, Mike Ledger, Acetates, and Filip Leu of course. There are a lot of new guys as well..."



I feel so lucky. I follow so many great artists. I feel super blessed to be involved in tattooing; it's very humbling. And I have super nice clients. Sometimes we become close friends. There's a great positive energy created between us. Tattooing is all about energy, and you have to be careful that it isn't ever destructive. If a customer is nervous, it's important to help them relax. I work at creating a good energy to make it a positive experience for them. If they are calm and cool, that will in turn make things much easier for me. And their pain will be less too. It's all about respecting the customer. I always keep in mind how hard it can be for a customer to come into a tattoo shop, and also how long it can take to save up the money. People make big sacrifices in order to get tattooed. As tattooists we must never forget that."



Len has an air of intensity and focus about him, and over the years his enthusiasm for the craft of tattooing has grown ever stronger. He has a real talent for drawing. But in contrast to Ben, who has embraced new technology and regards his iPad as an essential tool, Len admits to being a complete technophobe. "I have an Instagram account and I know how to use it, but my daughter set it up for me. If I get a new phone, I have to get Ben here at the shop or my daughter to move everything over. I don't use an iPad or a laptop. When I tattoo, I use a stencil from a drawing that I have done on paper - and a lot of the time I draw direct onto the body. It's easier to prepare your design on paper, but for traditional images like snakes and dragons I draw them straight on. I discuss the design with the client but I don't show them a finished drawing. Often I don't do a finished drawing!"

"If you want to be a good tattooer then you need to be a good craftsman."

Tattooing has been re-defined as an 'art form' by the media, but underneath it's still a craft. Tattooing is a service for the client and art is something else. You never stop learning the craft of tattooing. Take coil machines, for instance. They're an integral part of that craft. I spent years learning how to tune them properly, take them apart and put them together, bend the spring, don't bend the spring... You have to understand the coil machine before you switch to a rotary. I've been collecting coil machines for a long time, and I still use them, but I do use rotaries as well."

As for inks, Len likes Solid Ink from Federico Ferroni and has been with them since their inception. "I tried out Solid Ink long before it went on sale. I've recommended it to lots of people who have subsequently moved over, so it must be good. And of course I love to use Dermaglo. It's hard to beat. I love it when tattooists make stuff. I'm always more likely to support them."



Len has achieved that difficult balance of establishing his own individual style whilst at the same time honouring the traditions of Oriental tattooing. (He told me customers often recognise his unique work on other customers!) And he is clearly dedicated to his work. "I don't get as much time as I would like to pursue art, because I start tattooing early every morning and don't finish until late every night - and then of course I have my family to think of too. They've sacrificed a lot. We have a daughter, but I have never been to her school plays because I'm always working... But tattooing gives us an amazing life."

A good example of Len's dedication and discipline is the fascinating project he undertook in 2014. Every day, for the whole year, he drew a hannya mask first thing in the morning before he did anything else (literally, he wouldn't even allow himself to pee before finishing the drawing). At the end of the year, he collected the drawings into a book, 'The Daily Hannya'. "I learnt so much from that project. I studied the hannya image from every angle. It was really good for my thinking process."



Clan of Tusk is a small shop and space is limited. "I would never have an apprentice or anything like that," Len told me. "I'm still learning myself!" But a while back, new team member Renko joined Len and Ben. I wanted to know what it was about him that made Len offer him a place at the shop. "I never actually invited him to come and work here. He asked me! He was working at La Main Bleue, with Alex Wuillot as his mentor, but sadly Alex died in a motorcycle accident. Renko doesn't speak French, and Le Main Bleu is in the French part of Belgium, so he was struggling a bit. That's why he asked if he could come and work here. I was flattered, but I know I'm not an easy person to work with. I have certain rules. Like, you have to live tattooing and you have to put the client first. But Renko gets it, and so far we have all got along fine."

At this point Ben, who has been finishing a tattoo, joins our conversation. Ben has known Len for a long time. They first met in art school and their friendship grew through their shared love of skateboarding. Ben remembers they used to talk about tattooing back then, and he dabbled a bit, but some "bad life decisions" meant he never got round to doing it seriously. It was only relatively recently that he picked up a machine again and got into tattooing properly. He told me he's always collected tattoos, but postponed getting involved professionally until a time when he could truly dedicate his life to it.

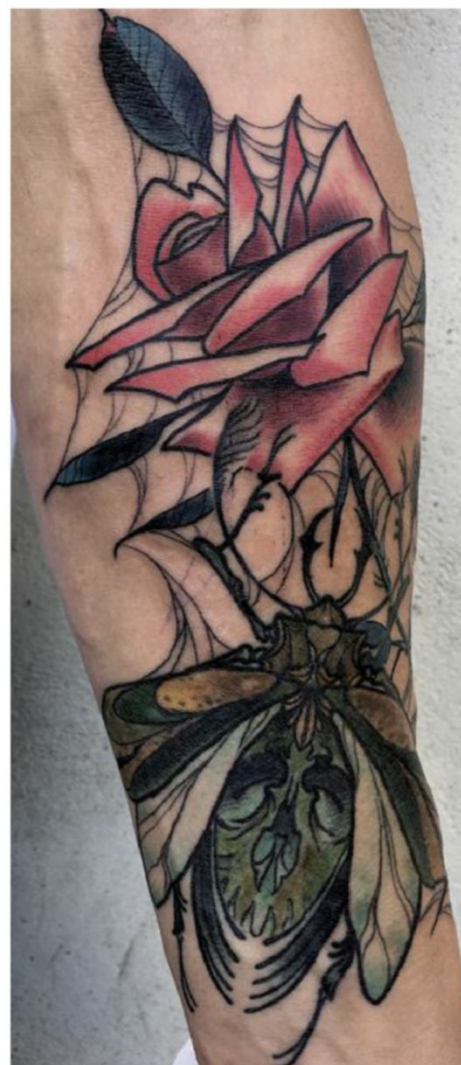
Ben considers his work still to be in a developmental stage. "I look at roses that I did five years ago, and then I compare them to the ones I do now, and I see enormous progression. It's strange when customers come in with an old piece of mine and ask me to extend it. That's why I would never tattoo my wife..." He sees himself very much at the beginning of his journey. "Every time I think I've mastered something technical

in tattooing, I realise there is still so much more that I can learn. Part of the reason that I came here to work with Len is that I'm self-taught and I wanted to step up. I was busy enough tattooing at my previous place - because I was the only one in the area - but when Len asked, I knew it was a good opportunity for me."

Ben is massively influenced by the wacky imagery of the skateboard scene. He's exhibited his own designs, and he's cut and made his own decks. "For a time, I worked in a friend's business where we would create graphics, scan the drawings on to the computer, then send them to a company in America - Watson's - who would screen print the decks." At this point our conversation digresses as Len and Ben reminisce about skateboarding and talk about its importance as a source of creative inspiration. Before they came to tattooing, it was the great designs of artists such as VCJ (Vernon Courtlandt Johnson) that first turned them on to the power of graphic imagery. We look at a small selection of Len's skateboards and he explains where the name 'Clan of Tusks' came from. "I have a massive

collection of original boards in mint condition, and one board in particular - Mike Vallely's elephant design - is my all-time favourite. It has stuck with me all my life. A lot of tattooing has been influenced by skateboarding and that era in general."

So what kind of working relationship do Ben and Len have? "We argue occasionally, but underneath it all we do get on well," Ben tells me. "I'm not easy to work with," Len admits. "When I have a plan, I stick to it, and when I get an idea, I always become obsessed with it." I ask Len if he would describe this character trait as a form of OCD, at which point Ben looks at Len and laughs out loud. He is obviously all too aware of Len's idiosyncrasies and the daily challenges his friend faces. "OCD is not at all easy to live with," Len tells me. "For instance, I can't drive my nice cars because I can't cope with them getting dirty out on the road or wet in the rain. In fact it's destroyed the whole pleasure of owning them. I'm too stressed to even use them." And Ben adds, "When you think about it, it's not surprising that the various rituals involved in tattooing,



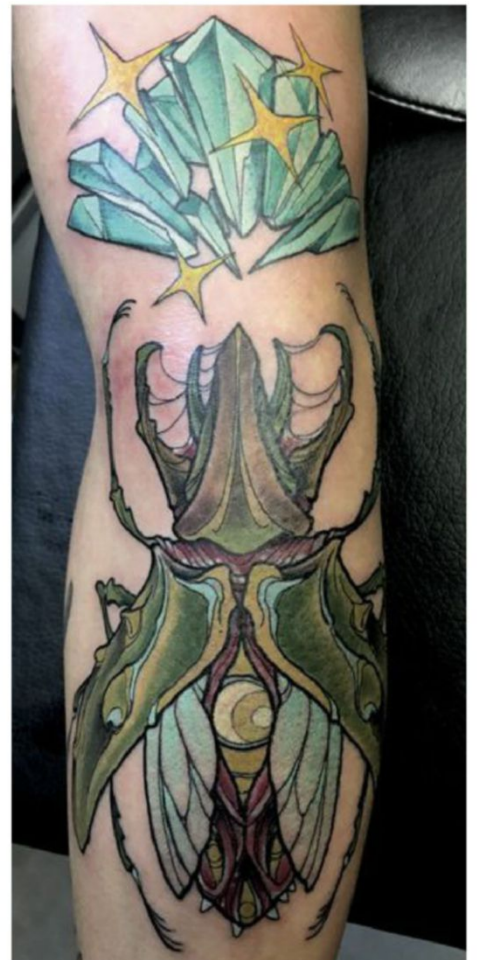


including all the precautions a tattooist needs to take against any possibility of cross-contamination, can easily trigger OCD.”

As competition for customers intensifies all over the tattoo world, there is an increasing need for artists to use all available channels to promote themselves. Len confesses that he feels Ben is almost too laid back in this respect – because he's happy simply to wait for success to come his way through word-of-mouth recommendations – whereas Len himself is more driven, with a keen vision of where he wants to be and how to get there. “But I would not have opened this shop with anyone else,” he tells me. “Ben's work is amazing, original and solid. He's an incredible guy who should be booked up for months, but Brugge can be a funny place and unless you are pushing all the time it's easy to get overlooked.” This highlights the differences between them. Ben doesn't really plan or look to the future; he just takes each day as it comes. For Len, things need to have more of a structure.

But different though their personalities might be, Ben and Len – together with Renko – have created a shop that effortlessly caters to whatever work their customers want. There is a beautiful studio in one of the most beautiful cities in Europe.

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A tattoo trip to **BORNEO**

Words and photos by Doralba Picerno



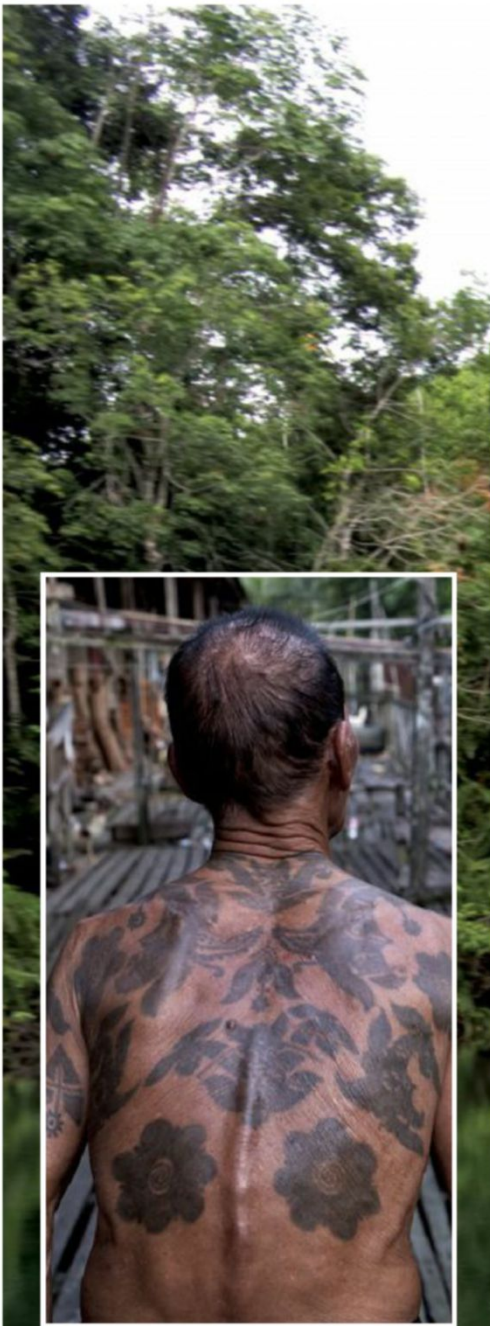
These days, on our ever-shrinking planet, there aren't many places left where you can journey to a remote location and experience the way of life of a disappearing culture. But that's exactly what Doralba Picerno did on a recent trip to Borneo, when she spent time with a small tribe living in a longhouse on the shores of the Batang Ai lake in Sarawak. Here is her account of a fascinating adventure.

Borneo is a large island of tropical beaches, rugged scenery and ancient rainforests. It is part of the Malay Archipelago in southeast Asia and, territorially, it comprises the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, Indonesian Kalimantan, and the nation of Brunei. When I first arrived, I was mainly thinking about the wildlife I would see during my visit (including the famed orangutan); what I didn't expect to find were the last vestiges of traditional tattooing. But, accompanied by our guide Wayne, we were able to have a privileged glimpse of Iban culture and their rapidly disappearing way of life.

The Iban are former headhunters and this historic legacy has given them an understandably fearsome reputation. But headhunting (*ngayau*) was largely eradicated by the end of the nineteenth century – although it did continue into the early twentieth century – having been suppressed under the rule of Sir James Brooke, the first ‘White Rajah’ of Sarawak. Enemies’ heads were trophies in conflicts and struggles for over-crowded land – a proud display of Iban fighting prowess – but *ngayau* is believed to have had other important social meanings too, including being a rite of passage into manhood. In the 1950s and 60s Western missionaries (Seventh-Day Adventists, to be exact) encouraged the abandonment of many ancient cultural practices. Many Iban converted to Christianity, but local deities are definitely still alive and well.



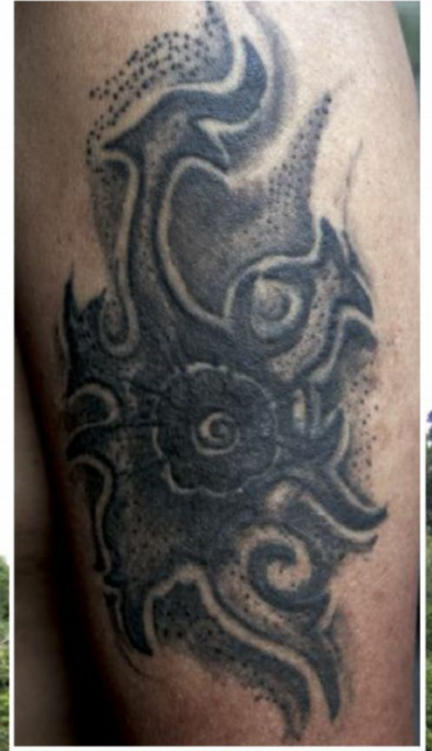
The longhouse (*rumah panjai*) communal living system is a very egalitarian social model. There is no ‘aristocracy’ as such; instead an elected chief or house-leader (*tuai rumah* or *penasihat*) has more of an advisory role, administering the law, maintaining longhouse codes of behaviour and mediating in disputes. A long corridor provides a communal living space, which is also where various rituals and ceremonies take place, and doors along its length give access to individual family quarters – a sitting room, with a kitchen behind it, and sleeping areas further back. (A community is often described in terms of the number of doors it has – a “39-door longhouse” for instance.) Each longhouse community would have originated as a single family unit, with the house itself being extended – lengthwise – as the family itself grew or as other families arrived. In former times, this kind of structure made sense strategically; it would have been much easier to defend than a traditional spread-out village.



During our stay, we were accommodated in the long communal living area. I have to admit it was quite a challenge! As 'modern' Westerners, we are unaccustomed to living in such close proximity to so many other people, and alongside so many animals too (both wild and domestic). And we're certainly not used to sleeping surrounded by the noises of the forest.

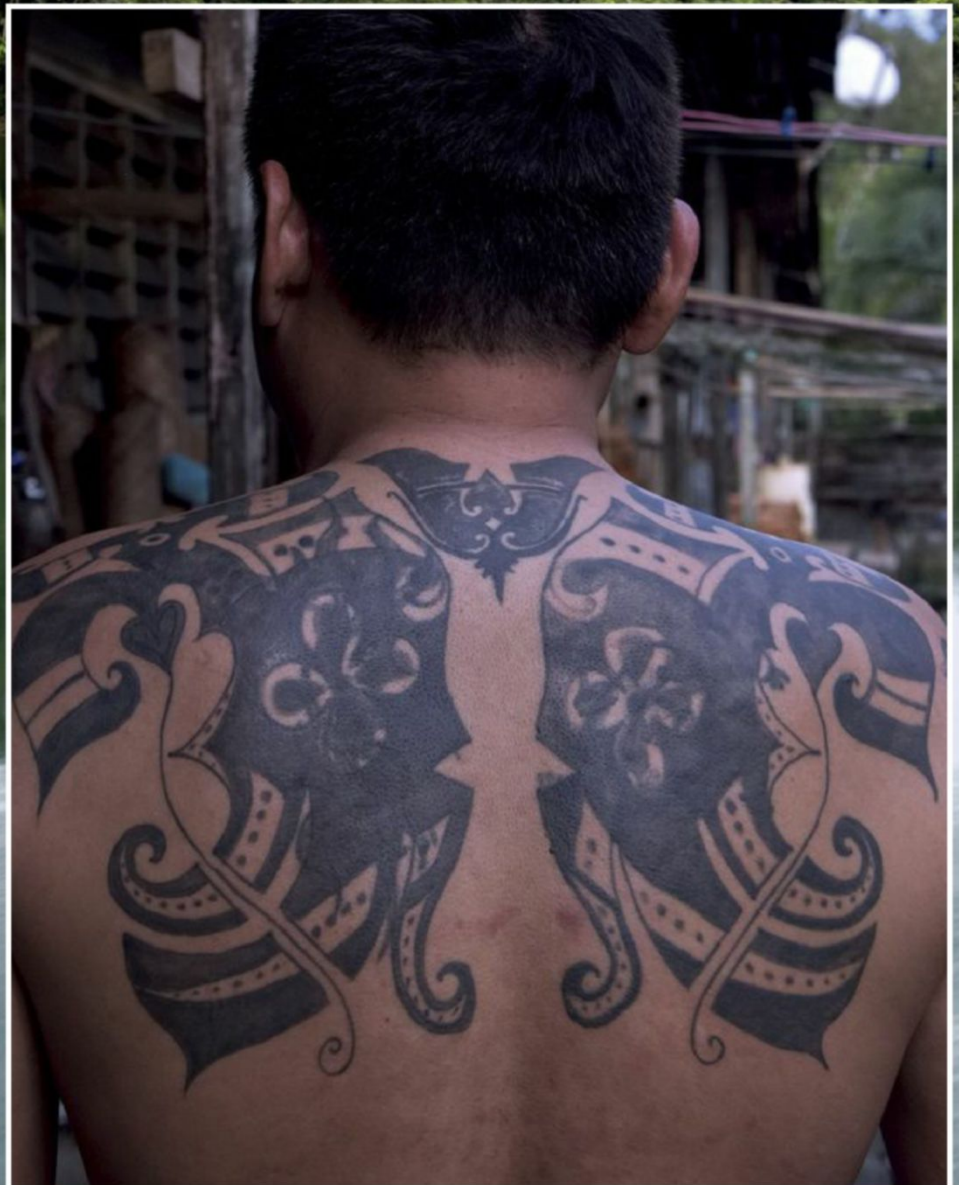
The Iban way of life is still – just about – rooted in traditional ways. These days every family has their own generator (whereas there used to be just one for the whole longhouse) but electricity is still rationed; for now, it only makes an appearance between 8pm and 10pm to minimise fuel usage. The community derives a limited income from working in nearby pepper plantations and from the handmade items they sell to visitors. The Malaysian government is offering financial incentives to tempt people into the palm oil business, and already on the lake shore not too far away new longhouses are being built with all mod cons. The pace of socio-economic change will obviously accelerate with the arrival of the upgraded Sarawak Pan-Borneo Highway. One senses that when the last few elders of the tribe are gone, a very different way of life lies ahead.

In the longhouse where I stayed, there are only three men with traditional tattoos. Two of them are nearly 80 years old. And there is no longer a tattooist here, so – in this community at least – these will be the last Iban men tattooed with the old motifs using the ancient techniques. Current *tuai rumah* Sambau Anak Chabi sports tattoos



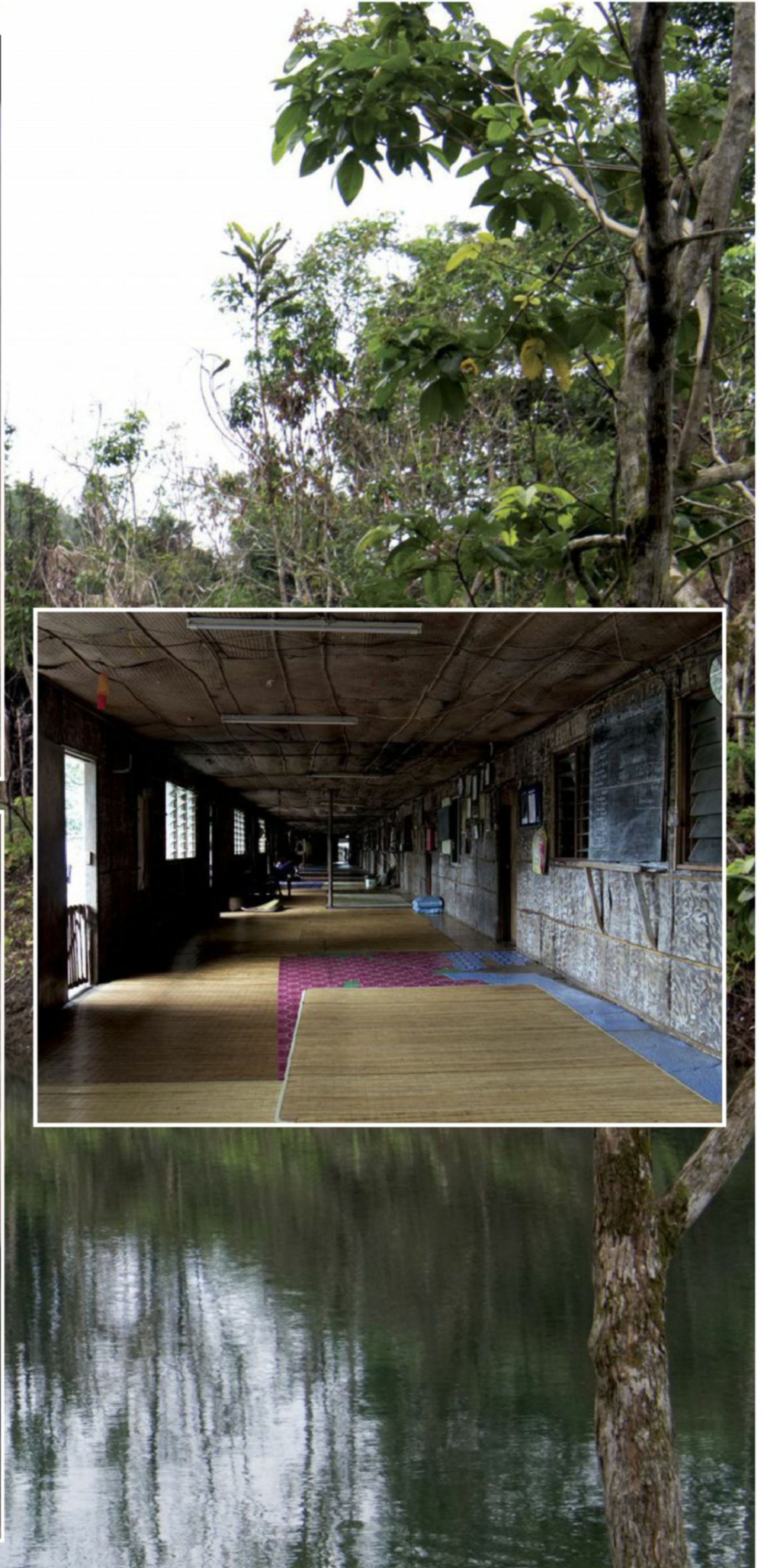
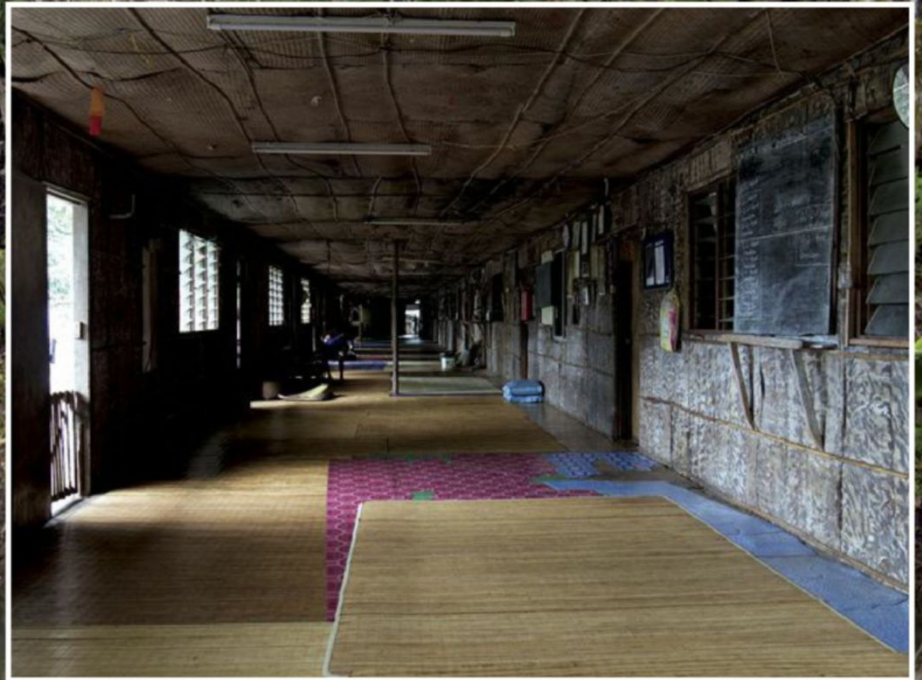
that show an unmistakable Western influence. They are a combination of the modern and traditional, and he got them when he was working on construction sites in Brunei and other parts of Sarawak – as many of the Iban do – to make a bit of money to bring back home.

We talk to Burau Anak Buba. As a young man, he was taken to the state of Kedah in northwest Malaysia to fight the Communist insurgency that began in 1968. Known for their knowledge of the forests, and their tracking and wayfinding skills, the Iban were deployed throughout Kedah because the forests are very similar to those in their native Sarawak. Many Iban died in the fighting in Kedah. It is only in the last few years that the government has begun to bring them back to rest in their own land. "I was 27 when I was taken to the Malaysian peninsula to fight," Burau Anak Buba tells me. "We got involved in the conflict because the British used us as trackers. But they armed us too. I killed a few men myself. Some of my tattoos remind me of my time in Kedah, and in Singapore too. I got the dragon in Kuala Lumpur. That was my first machine tattoo."





Burau Anak Buba has traditional tattoos with meanings connected to survival in war, protection whilst travelling, his attainment of manhood in the Iban tribe... and to guard him against the possibility of having his decapitated head displayed in somebody else's house! The flower motif is a symbol of his former role as *tuai rumah*. He tells me he got his first tattoo when he was 17 and his tattoos were made by a local Iban tattooist whose name was Du-Ji. They were hand-tapped, an important ritual believed to ward off evil spirits. Tattooing was a means of connecting with the divine; it was a direct link to the deities who would protect the wearer. The ink was made from roots, leaves and the carbon scraped from the wok in which these were cooked, mixed with a high concentration of sugar and a little kerosene. I ask whether it was a painful process. He points to the naked woman on this forearm. "Only this one. The rest - piece of cake! I even fell asleep while they were being done!"



One of Burau Arak Buba's tattoos is an elephant trunk. He explains that although there are no elephants in this part of Borneo (only in the more northern parts of the island) everyone has heard rumours of their size and strength. "In a way, this is not a complete tattoo," he tells me. To make it complete, he explains that it would continue on to the thighs, possibly blended with the traditional Iban stylised 'prawn' motif. This is the kind of tattoo favoured by the younger generation, although the contemporary version would be less fully black and there would be more line work.

One tattoo motif that has become particularly popular with Westerners is the 'Bornean rosette' (*bungai terung*). This design represents the local aubergine (or eggplant) flower, and it was a tattoo traditionally given to young men approaching adulthood and leaving home for the first time to experience the outside world. Positioned on the front of the shoulders, where a rucksack's straps would be, its purpose is to prepare the wearer to carry their world with them. The spiral inside the flower symbolises a new life.



With so many Westerners now acquiring these tattoos, I wondered if this kind of cultural appropriation was frowned upon. But without exception, the Iban I spoke to told me they considered it flattering – and far from the insult that the politically correct brigade would have us think.

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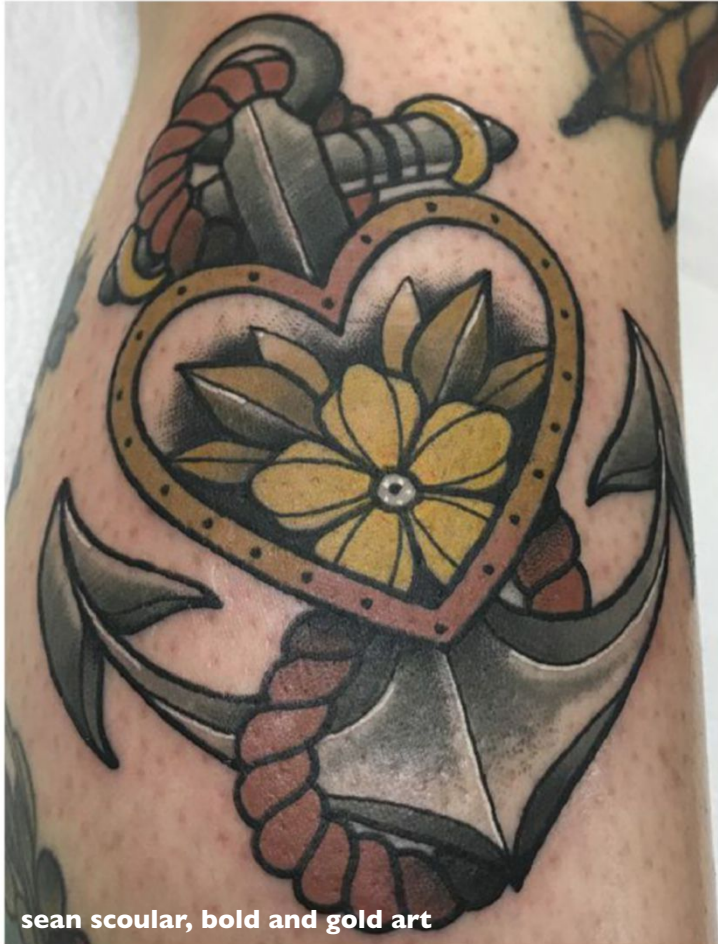
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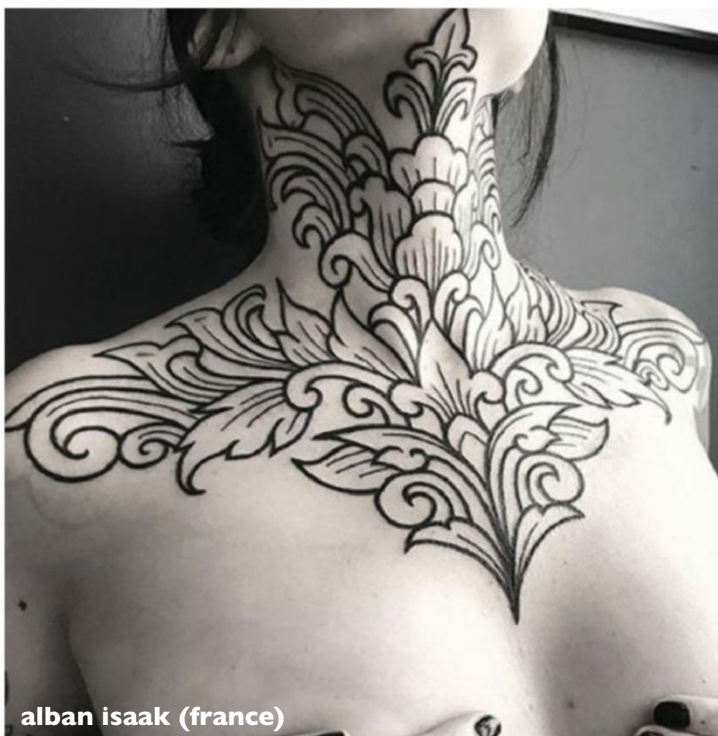
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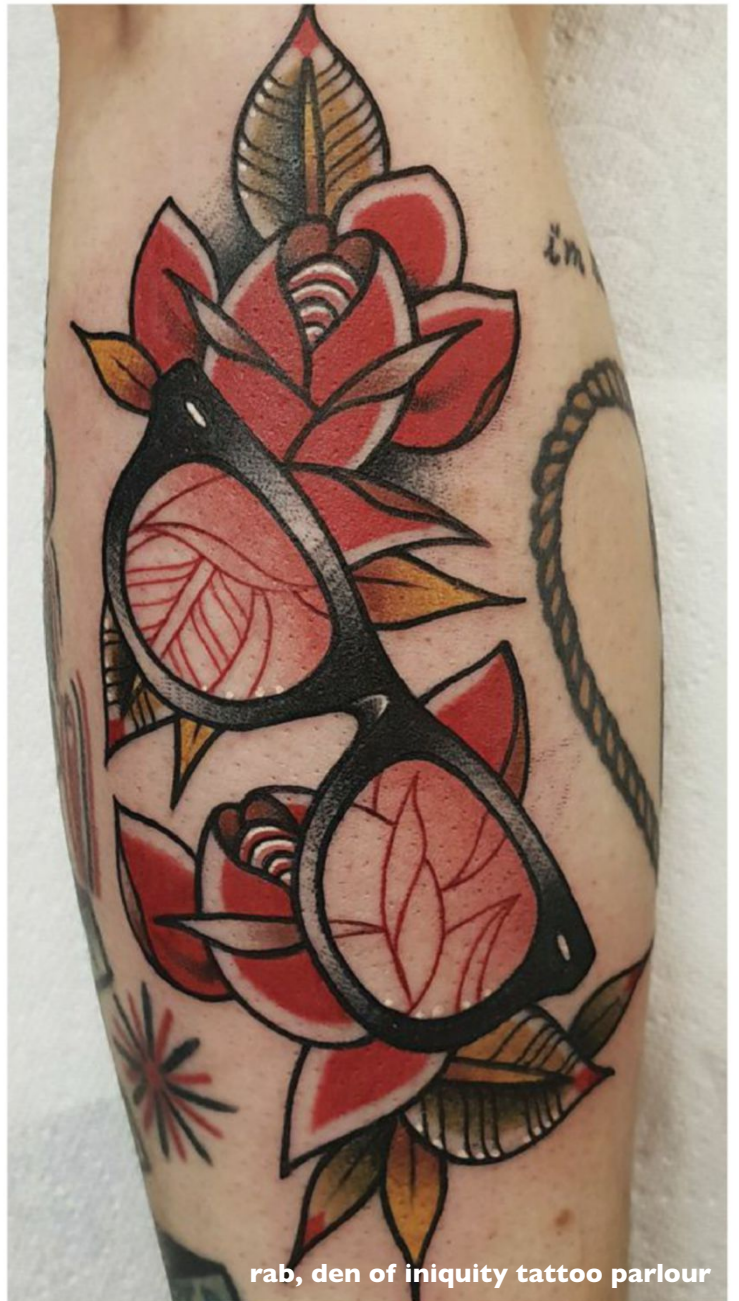


nicklas wong, ship shape tattoo
(new zealand)

mauro tampieri, raion tattoo (italy)



daryl watson, painted lady tattoo parlour



rab, den of iniquity tattoo parlour

inky joe, five keys



horisora, ryugendo (japan)



jordan keeble,
factotum



colin whitfield



ana mijovic, happy sailor



kyrie-anne, dabs tattoo



mike tarquino (colombia)



matty roughneck,
bold street



mark mcilvenny, fat fugu



danielle merrick, inkden

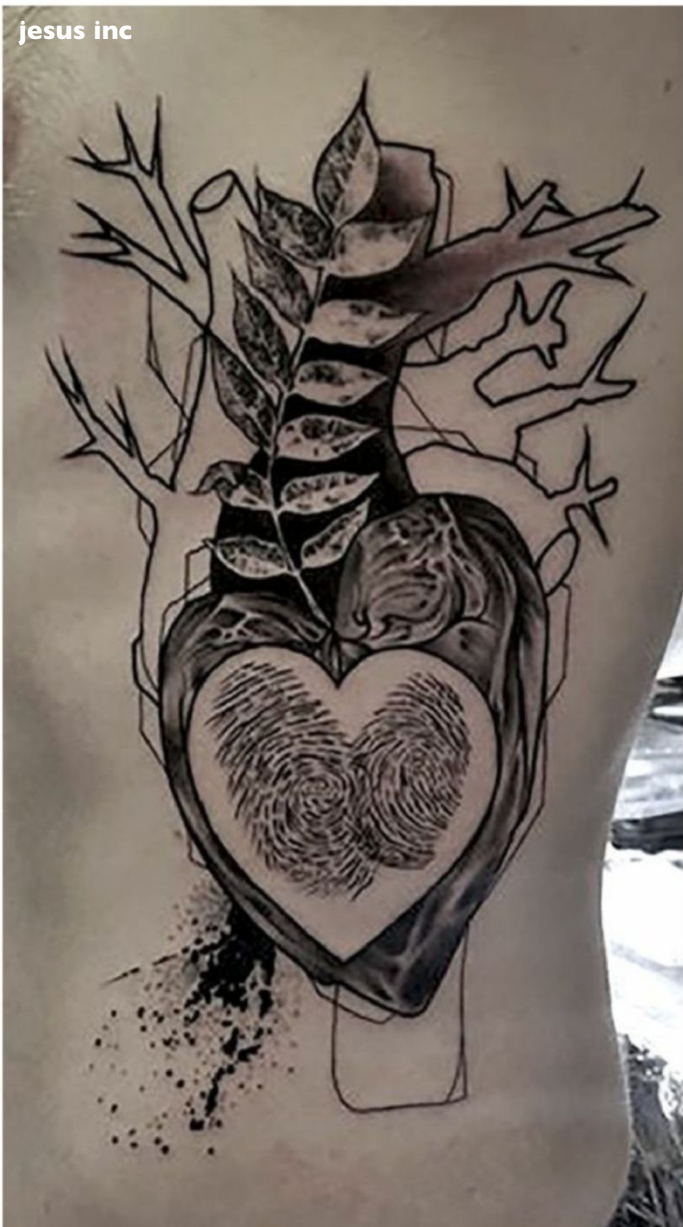
sven kleis, ewig und 3 tage (germany)



francesco luproso
(on the road)



jesus inc



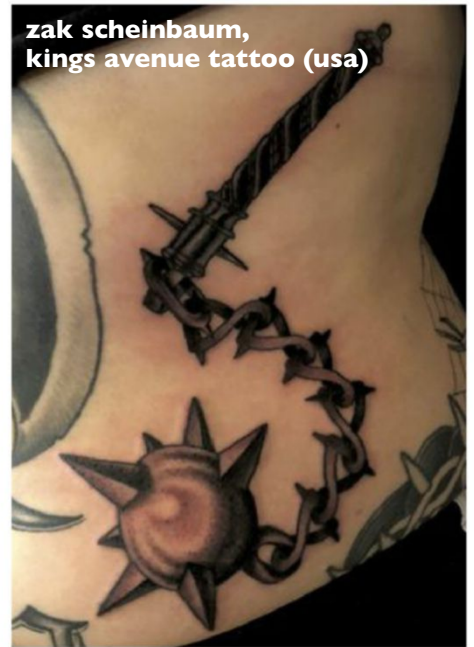
jordan campbell,
carousel tattoo and barber shop (canada)



acy jones,
the mighty stork tattoo club
(austria)



patrick mcfarlane,
black freighter tattoo co



zak scheinbaum,
kings avenue tattoo (usa)



wushang, wushang tattoo (china)



analogue disaster, black market tattoos



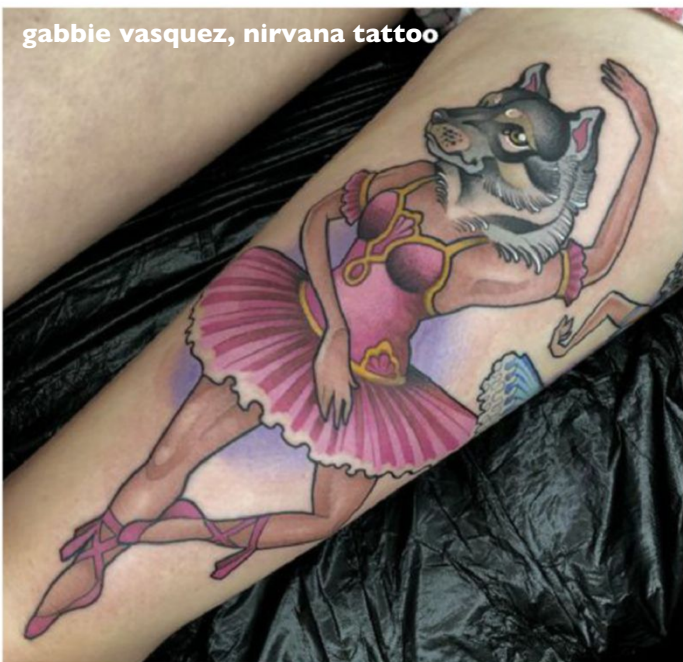
teide,
red point tattoo



alex garcia,
glorybound
(belgium)



jess diggins,
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gabbie vasquez, nirvana tattoo



ballsy, factotum

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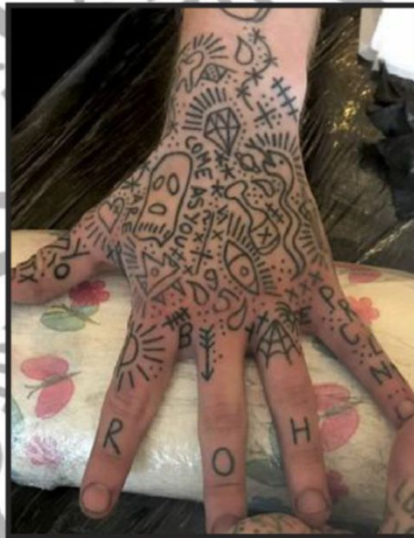
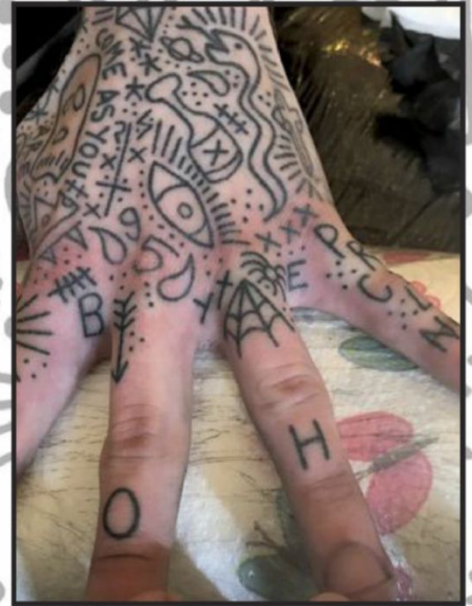
Everybody needs someone like 'Prison Style' Tim in their life. His sense of humour is A+, his hair is all over the place and he has excellent taste in eyewear. He carries his hand-poke tattoo gear around in two VHS boxes (*Fight Club* and *Akira* since you asked, plus *A Clockwork Orange* if an extra box is needed) and that's about as complicated as it gets. Among tattooists and the wider tattoo community, opinions are divided about his work. Some call it art; others argue that it's not 'proper tattooing'. But whatever the critics say, Tim is now a sought-after artist who guests at top studios and finds himself at the forefront of the latest trend. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting him and talking tattoos, music and everything in between.

You've tattooed in some very unconventional settings during your career. What was the strangest?

I once did a tattoo in someone's car, in the passenger seat after a gig. The pub where we'd played wouldn't let us tattoo on the premises, so it was really the only place we could do it. It was an interesting experience because the space was so limited! Some people out there will be very angry to hear this... but it's happened, and I'm putting my hand up and saying yes, I did it. And I know many who have done something similar. If you haven't, you've not lived! [Laughs]

So your general feeling is that tattooing in a non-studio environment is OK?

Honestly, I would be a hypocrite to tell people not to tattoo outside the studio environment. What I would say very strongly, though, is BE CLEAN and BE WISE. There's a lot of debate about 'safe place' tattooing, which is obviously a good thing. Deep down inside, what I feel is that EVERY tattoo space should be a



safe place – and you shouldn't have to go somewhere special to have that safety. There shouldn't have to be separate 'tattoo places.' The safe/unsafe thing creates unusual boundaries and tensions, but it doesn't really make me on edge or anything. My relationship with my customers is still the same. Fundamentally, I believe it's all simply about being nice to people!

It's that punk, DIY ethic.

Exactly. There's a lot of different hand-poking methods out there, but in my opinion it's all fine, as long as you're not killing anyone or causing irreparable damage. There are bedroom bandits, there are people who have private studios (like I did for a while), but if you've got someone who doesn't know what they're doing or is taking the piss and charging a fortune for fuck-all then that's essentially a bit mad. I think people do gather around the artists that are good.

Tell us more about yourself and how you came into tattooing.

I'm 36 years old now, and I've been hand-poke tattooing for three or four years. I used to do machine tattooing. Basically, way back when I was 18, a lovely friend of mine called Woody [at 1770 in Brighton] refused to tattoo my hand. So I decided to buy all the kit and do it myself. Then I went back and showed them, and they were like, "What the fuck have you done?!" They were very forgiving though, and they actually gave me lots of helpful advice about how to tattoo. I did it for a while, but really I was just having fun and destroying people's skin! [Laughs] I stopped a short time later, and it was only after I moved to London that I thought about doing it again. But I really didn't like machine tattooing, and to be honest I wasn't that good at it. So I tried hand-poking... and found that I was actually OK at that!





And you adopted the name 'Prison Style'.

Yes. But I've not been in prison (and hopefully I won't ever be!) and therefore some people feel I'm trying to appropriate that style when I'm not entitled to do so. But it's not that at all. It's just a name. It's more about the WAY I used to do tattooing – outside a studio environment. If I was at a gig I might take my kit and tattoo someone right there. I also worked in retail for ten years, and sometimes I'd tattoo my colleagues after work in the pub. The whole idea of the name is that refers to the kind of stuff you could do if you WERE in prison – you just grab basic equipment and do something on the spur of the moment, to axe the boredom. That's all.

People are so ready to attack any kind of cultural appropriation.

And prison culture seems to be massive now! There's been a huge shift in attitudes towards it. I think it was those gritty Russian books that originally sparked the interest. A friend of mine has an account called French Prison Style which is getting really big on social media. It's a similar thing to when



people get a Swastika tattooed and define it as a Hindu symbol and not a Nazi one. There's none of the backdrop of oppression and the shit that comes with it.

And you're part of a huge popular trend.

I'm very lucky. I do doodles. That's my style. I doodle straight on. I like things to look like the sketchbook of a fifteen year-old kid who's got a bit of a mood on. And it just kinda looks like the style you see in prison tattooing... Hang on, let me start this again. SO, there's a little bit of truth in the 'Prison Style' name – in that my work looks a bit like those slightly jagged, slightly jarred, rough-and-ready tattoos people get in prison. I do like that look, and I did start to do that look. And that's what's evolved into me doodling on people's skin and giving them what looks like a sketchbook of doodles done with a biro. I've been very lucky because that style has only recently hit. People are now saying, "Just fill up my arm with doodles" – and that's fucking amazing, dude.

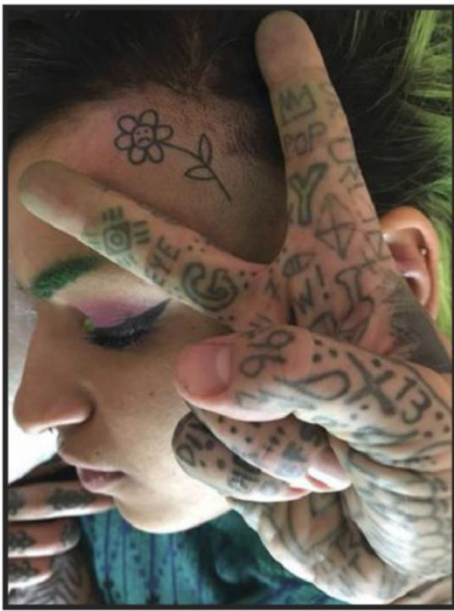
So it's not necessarily about the meaning?

There's two sides to the coin: I think a tattoo can mean loads to someone, which is totally fine. And a tattoo can just be there and be rad or a bit shit or just in-the-moment. Even then, it might still mean something, but the meaning doesn't necessarily have to be anything sentimental. I think my doodles are mainly just to look rad! But I always ask clients for something like their date of birth, or any special names, etc, so that I can make the piece totally unique to them.

Is tattooing a fairly spontaneous process for you?

Yeah. Each piece is drawn with a biro,

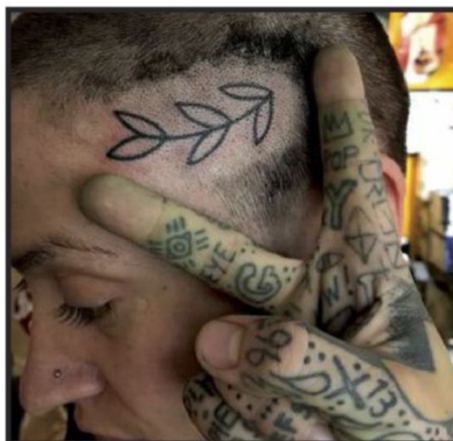
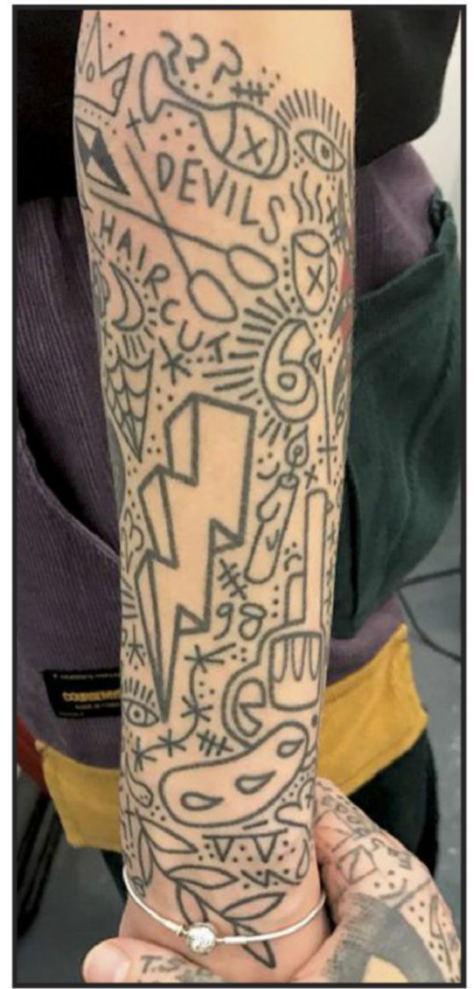
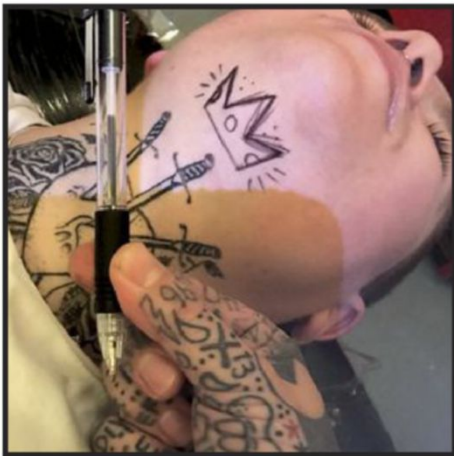




done automatically, without a stencil. More often than not it won't get altered. It's just one take. It's insanely flattering that people let me do that to them.

And of course it's an experience as well...

Ah yes. That's a really good point. It's definitely all about the experience. I joke that I'm 70% therapist / 30% tattooist, and I don't think that's too far from the truth. I have a lot of regular clients, and we'll talk all about their lives while I'm tattooing. I don't consider myself to be a super-duper tattooist or even a tattoo 'artist' as such. I'm a craftsman. I know how to get ink into the skin. I have a vague style that happens to be on the up, but I'm a lifestyle dude. I like to chat. I like to be me. I like to help people with



their problems and let them talk. Recently I had a bad cold and I felt awful because that meant I couldn't talk so much with customers. Sorry to those people! [Laughs] I know some tattooists can't work like that; it's not their thing. But everybody just needs to be themselves.

Do you think other tattooists are threatened by your approach?

No! [Laughs] I'm a tiny little speck. I'm nothing. I mostly stay outside the tattoo bubble. I feel blessed that I've been kinda given the thumbs-up by well-known people in our industry like Alex Binnie, Woody, Adam Sage, and others - not necessarily because of my tattooing, but just for being an OK person. I met Alex through working at Blue's in Hammersmith and Nikole Lowe's Good Times. It's all very flattering, but it's also more about being friends.

Do you attract a certain type of client?

Yeah, nutters! [Laughs] Actually I find it very odd that people come to me. They know they'll get a mad snippet of something weird. And that I'll be chatting to myself half the time without even realising it. I'm toned down on social media. I'm far worse in real life. It's like, "Oh fucking hell, Tim's here again, being full-on!"

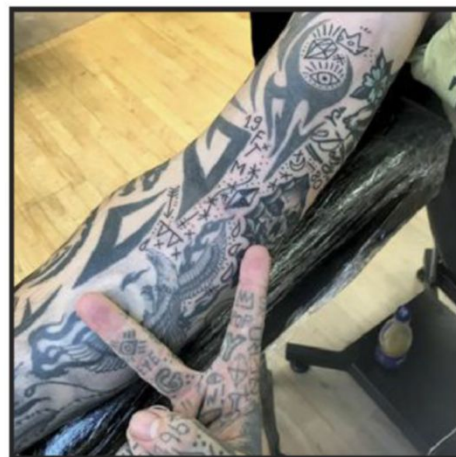
Why do you think clients come to you?

I think people come to get tattooed by me because I'm quite real. There's a rock 'n' roll side to tattooing – that old-school 'good old days' aspect – which I have a huge amount of respect for, but it can also feel a bit rockstar-ish now. Then when you see me, sat in a B&B the size of a shoebox, eating a Pot Noodle and twenty packets of Space Raiders while watching QVC... now THAT fucking rocks. People don't necessarily want the bling-bling of tattoo stardom. They just want something they can relate to. Maybe that's why I've been so lucky? And of course people will always sniff out disingenuous shit, just like they'll always sniff out good artists. I just see tattooing as a great way to meet people and interact with them – while at the same time giving them something good that will last long-term. It's brilliant.



Tell us about your equipment.

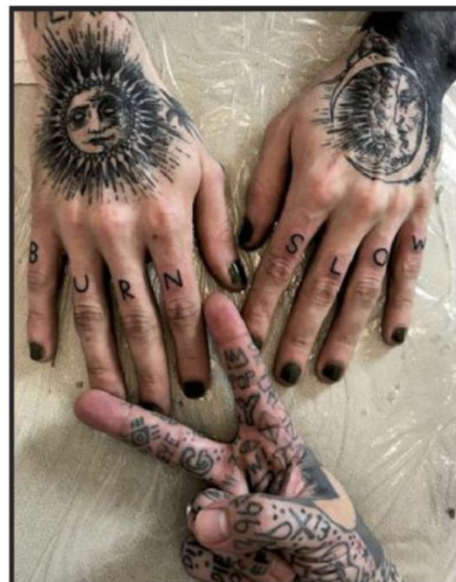
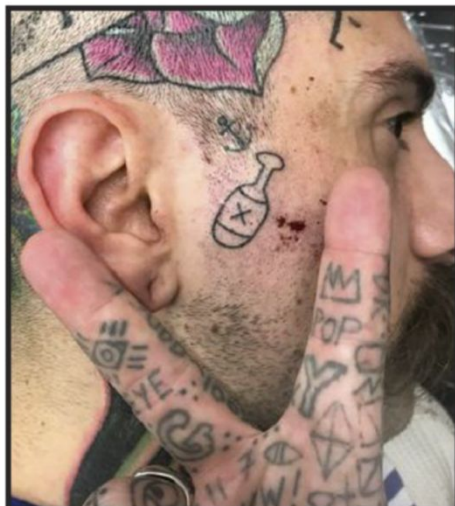
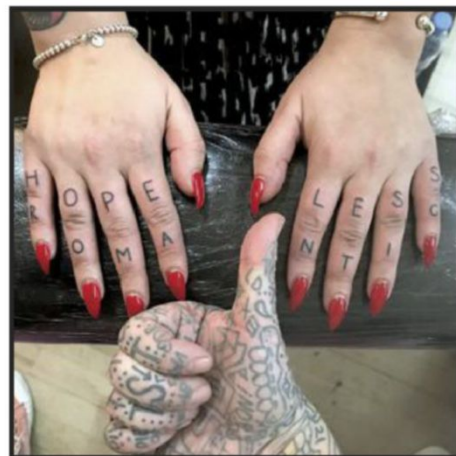
When I've gone to different studios to guest, they've asked me what needles I use, or stencil stuff or whatever. I would call that 'professional chat', and I'm not too *au fait* with it. There will always be the newest needles, or ink, or whatever, but I'm not fussed about brands. Recently, what's happened is that I've got RSI in my hand, because I haven't been using grips. It's such a stupid thing, it's so dumb. [Laughs] I understand that they're important, and that I should use one, but something in Mad Tim's Mind won't let me! It's not punk! If you can do something decent with a terrible set-up – if it's easy and convenient, something you could literally do on a train and get



a good result – then you're winning. I've got nothing against people who use grips, or who have expensive machines, because different things work for different people. All I know is that at some point in the future I may have to use grips because of the RSI. When you're hand-poking it's like trying to hold a pin with all your strength; so much energy gets focused into it.

What do you think you would do if your tattoo style goes out of favour a few years from now?

That's a very good question, but all of a sudden I feel very mortal and depressed! I think I'd probably just ride it out, or maybe I'd move on to something else, but let's hope it's at least ten years before it happens. I just feel happy and #blessed to be busy. When I look at social media I realise I'm such a small blip in the tattoo world. I'm already thinking about other things that are important to me. I have a son now, and I've recently started a little clothing line [PSTX Ink] – children's wear for slightly rebellious kids and their parents. There's also my music, pottery and other stuff. I get bored very easily so I always like to have more than one plate spinning. I expect it's all going to get too much at some point, and I will probably have a breakdown, but hopefully the universe will give me something back!





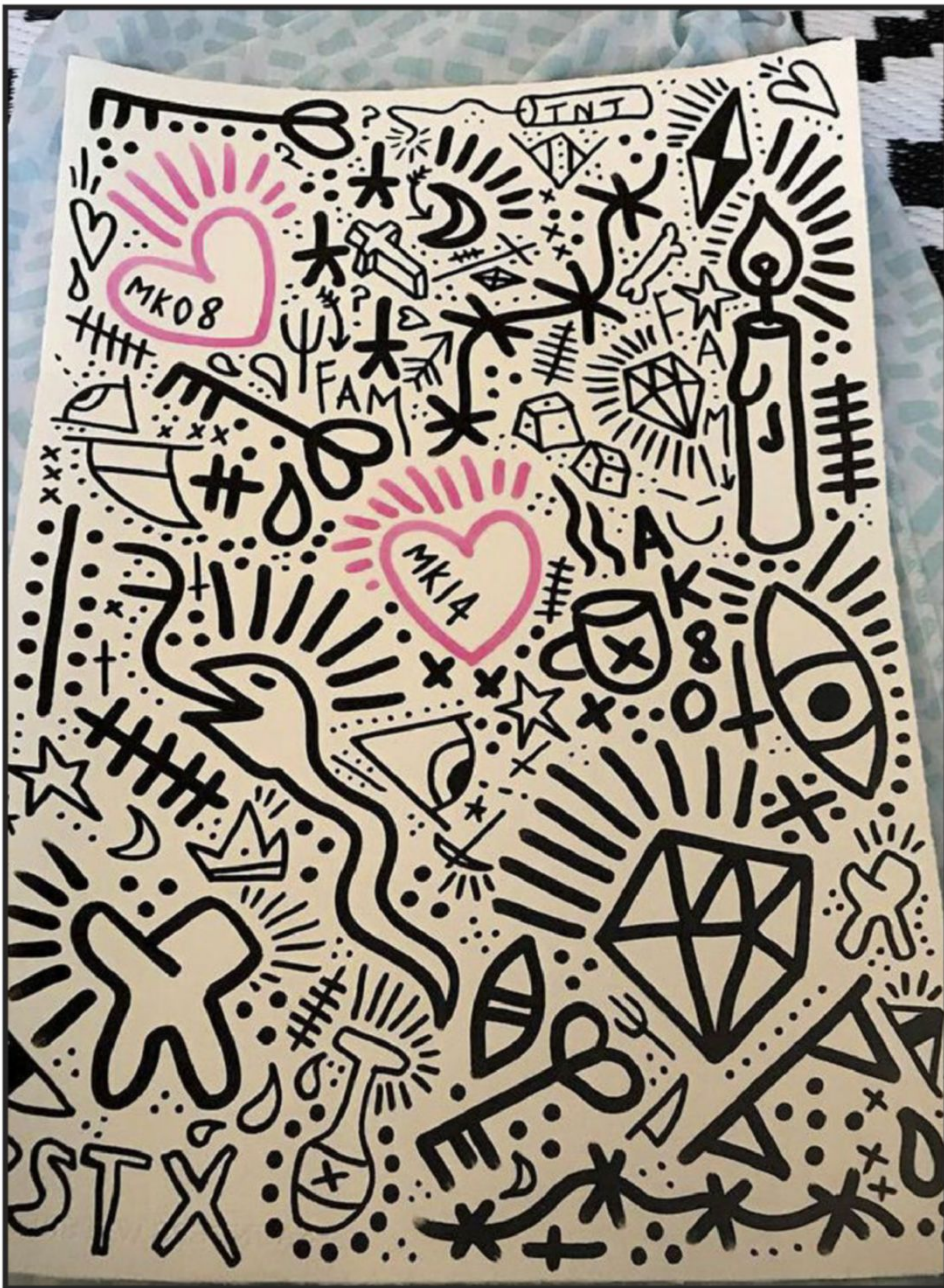
How do you relax?

I watch a lot of telly in the evenings – especially things like classic British comedy. BBC Two in the 90s was the best! Growing up it was always about Red Dwarf, Bottom, Alan Partridge. Last night in my hotel room I watched Father Ted, ordered a takeaway and had a beer and it was just the best nostalgic moment of my life. Oh, but I do miss my family when I'm away. Make sure you get that bit in!

Is that a tear rolling down your cheek?

It's just sweat! [Laughs] Yeah, family is very important. The responsibility of being a parent is huge. It's been a real wake-up call for me. The three biggest things in my life are definitely family, tattooing and music.



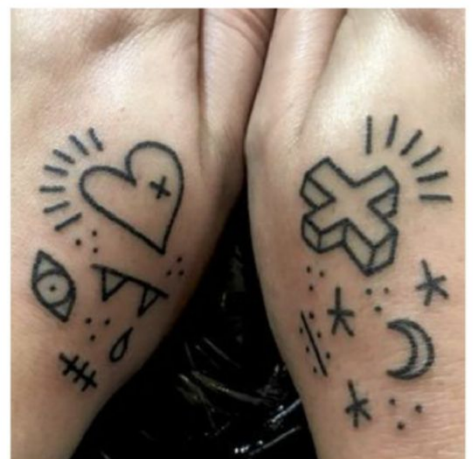


Tell us about your music.

I'm in a band called Dancehall. As Partridge would say, "It's wonderful stuff" - three friends having a bit of a laugh. I did do music for quite a while when I was younger, in a signed band. And the 100% end goal was to be famous. But the fame didn't happen, and the crashing realisation that it wasn't ever going to happen was insane - like world-falling-apart devastating. You're chasing something that's always out of your reach. This time around, we're just doing it just for fun and it's got some success organically, which is fucking wicked! We've got a little DIY record label called Anti-Vibe [vibeantivibe.bigcartel.com] and it's all done by us. It's completely the same as the way I do tattooing - that punk rock ethic, not taking ourselves too seriously, and just seeing what happens. Once you get rid of the pressure, it's very liberating.

That sounds like a good all-round philosophy for life.

I am the idiot in the room sometimes, which I totally accept, but I think we all need to have fun. Fun will always win over serious. Obviously, there are times when one has to be serious and professional, but fun's fucking rad!



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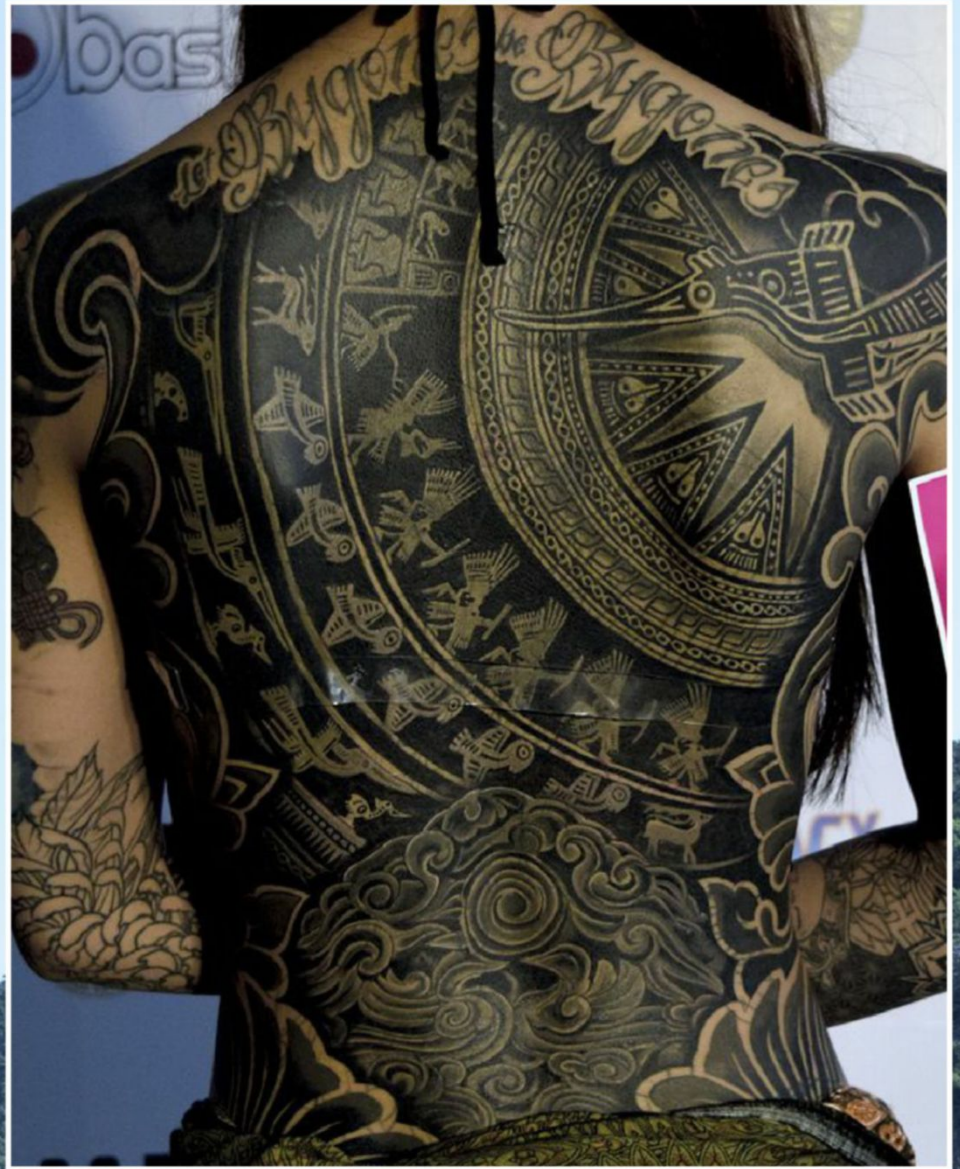
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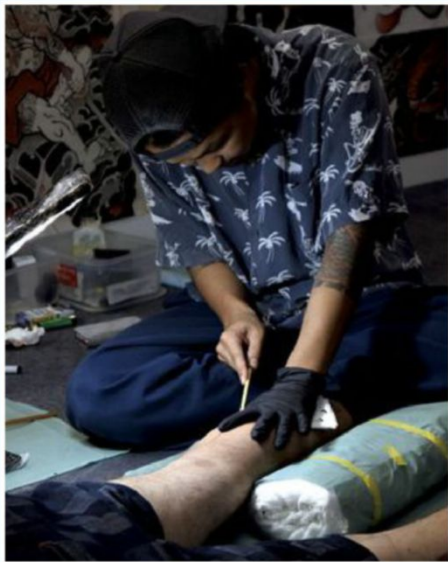


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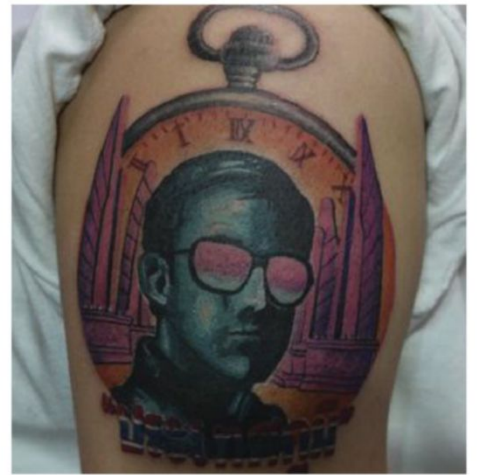
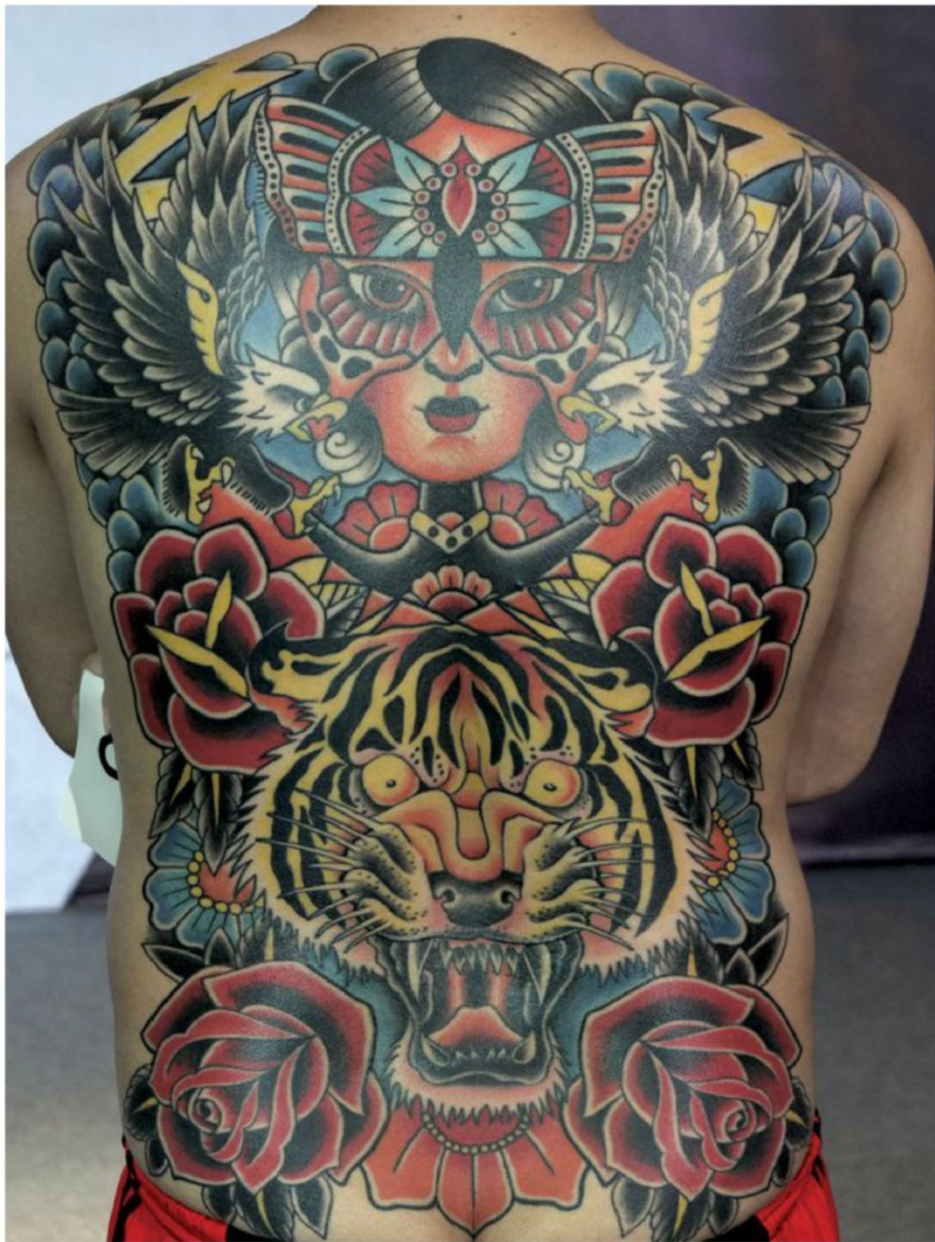
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INKY JOE'S ASIAN TOUR

Inky Joe, the well known wildlife and black organic specialist based at Five Keys Tattoo Studio in Norwich, recently travelled to Asia for the MBK Center Tattoo Fest in Bangkok and the Marina Tattoo Festival in Pattaya. Here's his report of the trip.



No words can describe the excitement I felt at being invited to work the International Bangkok Convention (as part of the World Tattoo Events Pro Team). I had never been to Thailand, so I was chomping at the bit to jump on the plane and see what it was all about. My first 24 hours were spent observing the bustling nightlife, trying the delicious street food and visiting beautiful temples, but then it was time to go to work!

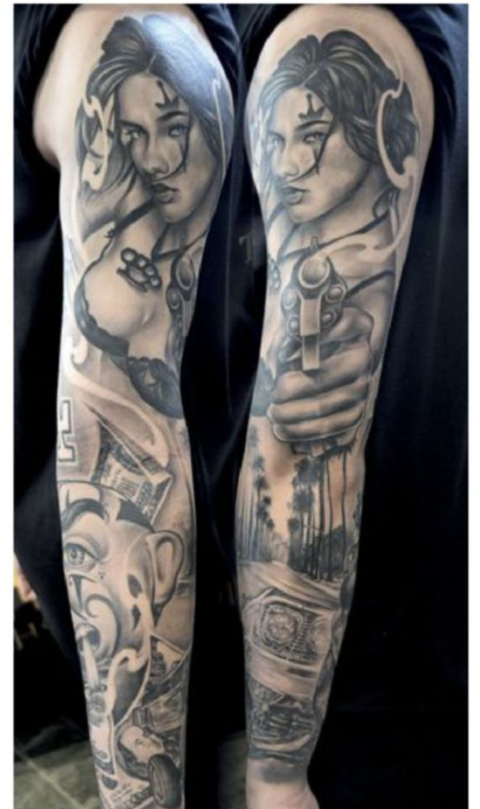
My initial surprise was the venue. The whole convention was spread across the busy entrance pavements and forecourts outside the MBK Center, a huge mall in Bangkok's Siam retail district. The public were free to come and go, ensuring a large, varied turnout consisting of artists, collectors, tattoo fans, expats and many people who may never have attended a convention under ordinary circumstances.

I was blown away by the standard of work, by artists that most of us in the West are never exposed to. There were so many tattooists spanning so many styles, many of whom were nothing short of modern masters, proudly showing off their healed clients, with beautiful backpieces, velvet-smooth realism, technically



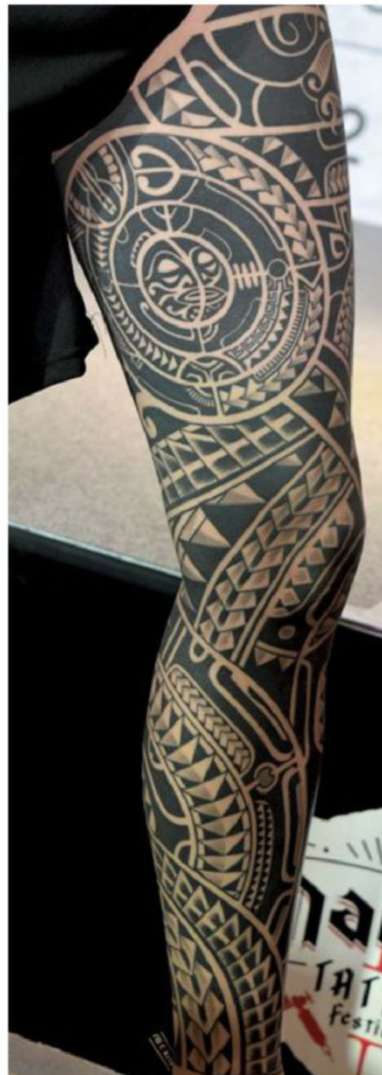


perfect Polynesian and delicate pointillism. I assumed there would be lots of traditional bamboo tattooing but there was only a small handful of practitioners, most of them using their iconic poking to create not the prayers we would expect, but soft realistic portraits and bold colour modern pieces. Thailand has a rich visual culture all its own, and personally I would have loved to have felt more of a traditional Thai vibe to the show. Aside from the fact that it was being held outside a modern mall – with most of the entertainment being Western music covers – there seemed to be too many artists neglecting Thai art and adopting Western styles and subjects instead. In that respect, I could have been at any convention in Europe.



After immersing myself in the urban chaos of Bangkok, it was time to recharge my batteries before heading to the next convention in the city of Pattaya. I spent a few days in the resort town of Ao Nang in the southern province of Krabi, exploring jungles and drinking coconuts on the beach whilst being massaged under palm canopies (no happy ending, just fewer knots in my achy tattooist's back!) then it was time to head back to work.





Pattaya's reputation precedes itself; it's either heaven or hell, depending on who you are. Drinking and party culture go hand-in-hand with the prolific sex industry. And the tattoo industry is represented in full force here too, with studios on almost every street. This was the Pattaya Convention's debut show, and it was hosted by the same organisation as the Bangkok Convention. In terms of venues, these guys certainly like to think outside the box. The Pattaya event was scattered over the ground floor of the Central Marina shopping centre. But despite the fact that it was open to all, with no entrance charge, it sadly did not have much footfall. This may have been due to the relatively low number of attending artists, or perhaps the impromptu planning of the convention. But although the show had its teething problems, I'm sure it will bounce back next year and really put Pattaya on the convention map.

I was asked to judge several categories in Pattaya, which is always an honour, and although there were some stunning pieces being presented, I recognised many of them from the Bangkok convention the previous week. That was one of the interesting things I've noticed about Asian conventions; the main focus is on the competitions and there is very little in the way of flash walk-up culture.

All in all, it was a fantastic privilege to be able to participate in these Thai conventions. Take a look at the accompanying photos for a flavour of the visual treats I experienced on the trip!





Spanish tattooist Willy Martin Martinez, of BirdHouse Tattoo in Móstoles, has a bold, illustrative style. He often gives his subject matter an interesting twist. We first came across him at the International Brussels Tattoo Convention and we were keen to find out more about him...

How long ago did you start tattooing?

I'm 42 now, and I started tattooing when I was 20. The tattoo world was very different then. All I was thinking about was having a good time!

When did you decide to become a tattoo artist?

It wasn't a decision I ever made. I'd never even given it any thought. It just happened! I was at college, I decided to miss class one day... and I got the job of my life.

Tell us more...

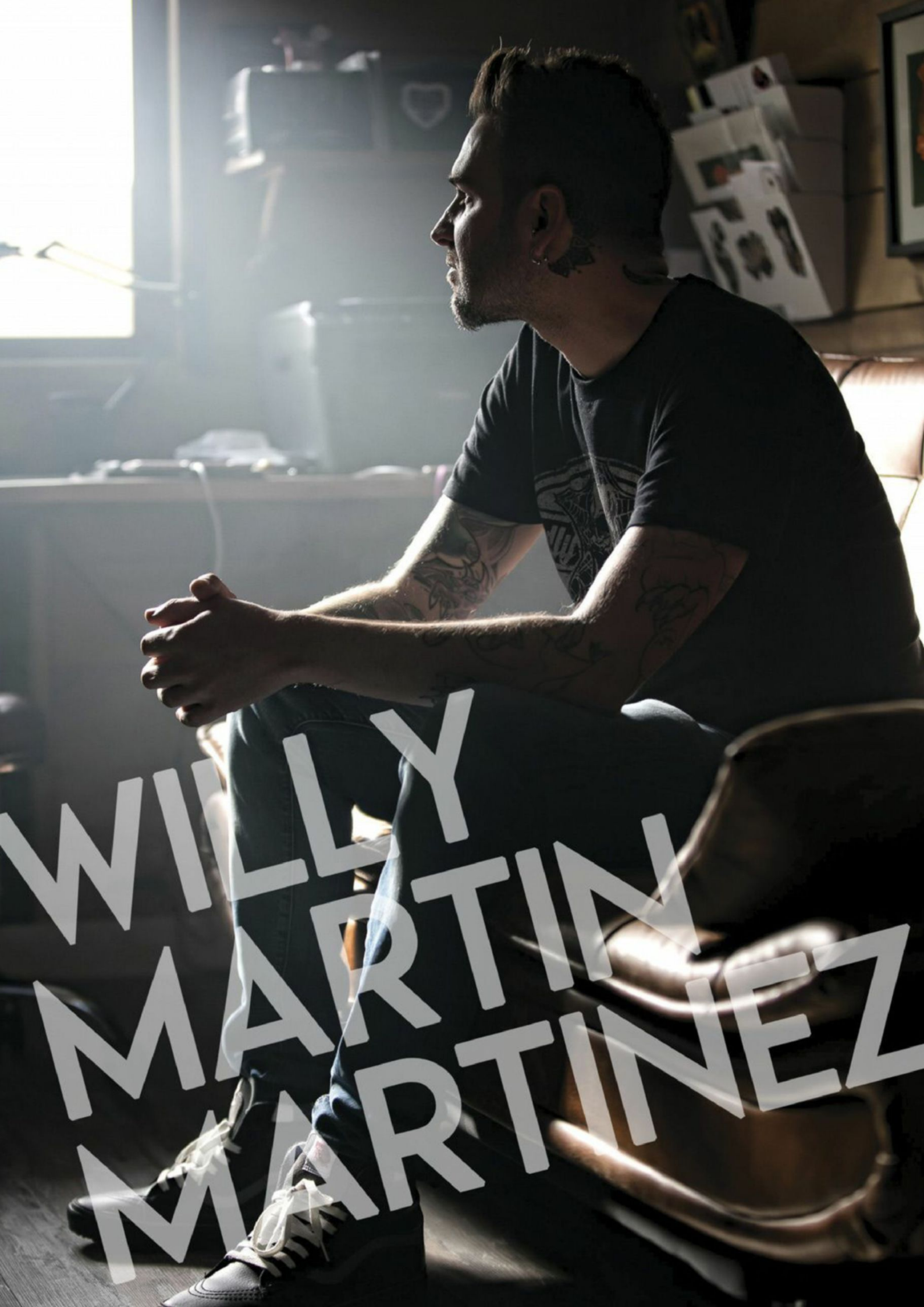
I was doing postgraduate studies in urban planning. I loved the technical drawing side of it – I've always drawn, ever since I was a child – but the course wasn't really my thing. One day, I visited a tattoo studio and showed them the folder of drawings that I happened to have with me. It was Laura Juan's Soul Tattoo in

Móstoles. They liked my designs, and actually bought some of them on the spot. I started visiting the studio on a regular basis, and began creating flash for them. One day they asked me if I would like to be part of the team and learn to become a tattooist. That scared me a little – because really, I just liked to draw – but I said yes.

And that's how it all began for you.

Yes. I did a very traditional apprenticeship there, making needles and cleaning tubes, opening and closing the shop, etc, as well as drawing designs for clients. When I was drawing, I had two batteries stuck with tape to my pencil to help me get used to the weight of a tattoo machine. Little by little, I became accustomed to working that way. Then I started practicing on pig skin with a Spaulding & Rogers that Laura lent me. Finally I began tattooing on human skin.





WILLY
MARTIN
MARTINEZ



The tattoo world was very different twenty years ago...

Yes, it was. When I first started, there was no internet, we didn't have iPads, nobody published sketchbooks, and supplies were very difficult to get hold of. Tattoo magazines were our 'Instagram'. That was where we saw what was happening in different countries. But the truth is, it all felt very authentic. That's how I remember it. Everything is very different now. It's changed so fast.

How has your own style evolved over the years?

For a time I was doing black and grey in a very dark style. I was fascinated by what Robert Hernandez was doing, and it was something I wanted to emulate. But over the years I've done a bit of everything. It's taken me a long time to consolidate my own style – in fact I don't think I've yet finally defined it. I've abandoned realism in order to focus more on my own designs, and my aim has been to develop my use of colour. The styles I find most comfortable are New School and Neo-Japanese. I still have a lot to learn!



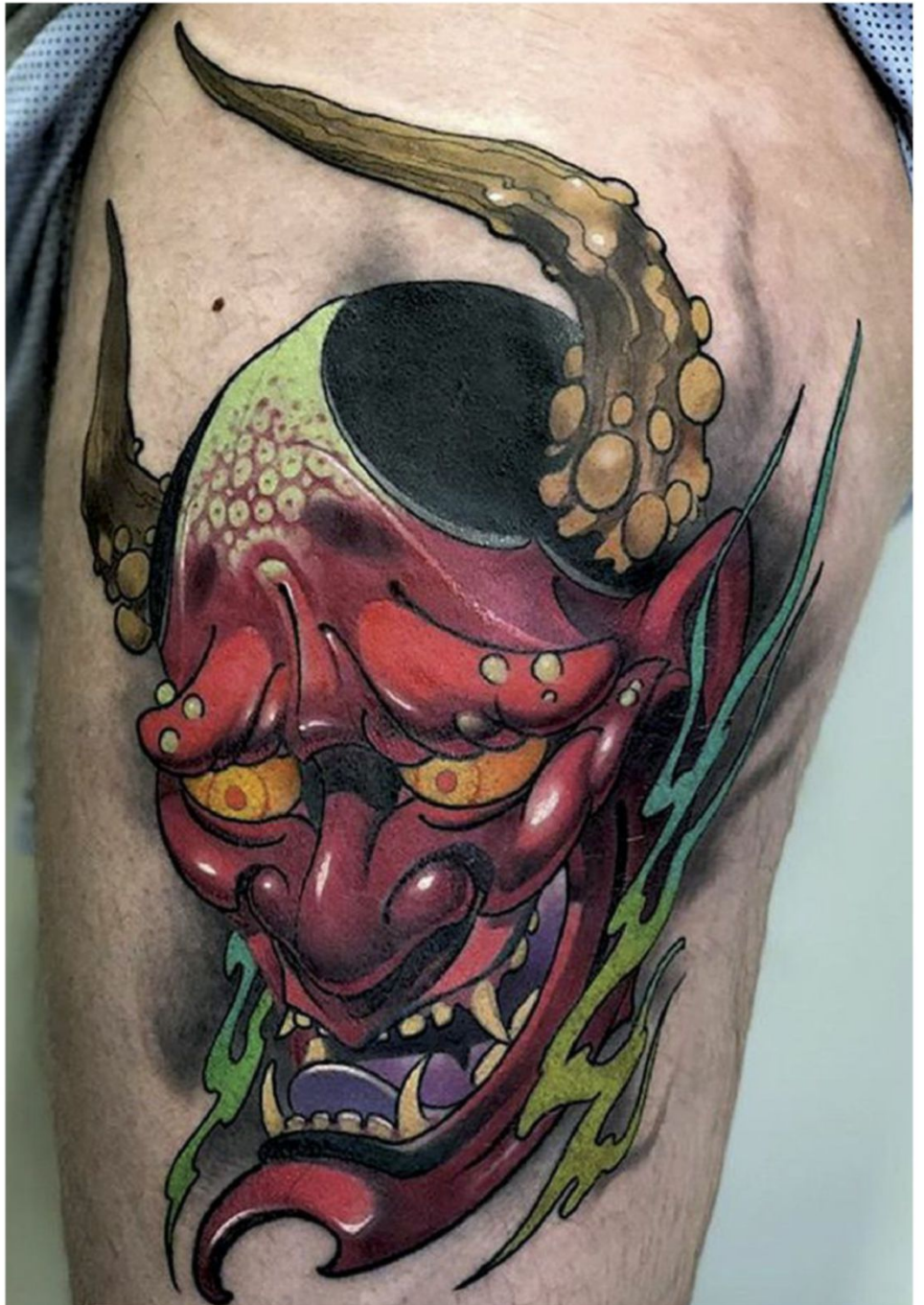


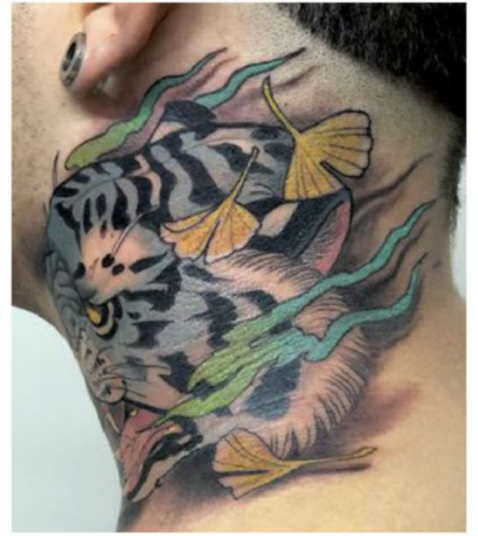
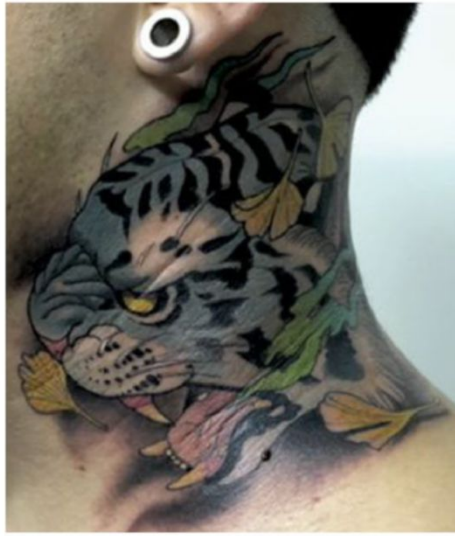
What are the most important elements of your style?

I like to transmit movement and dynamics. I like simple compositions on a large scale, with plenty of colour of course.

How do you feel about recent developments in equipment and technology?

So many of the new generation of artists don't know even know how to make needles... and I no longer make needles myself, or use coil machines, or clean tubes, or have an autoclave. I use disposable supplies, and the latest Pen-type machine. Everything is so much more practical and safe. I'm in favour of giving new technologies a chance as long as they make a positive contribution to what I'm doing and facilitate my work. Using an iPad for drawing has saved me a lot of time, and it has also expanded my creative horizons.





Was it difficult to transfer your paper skills to the screen?

I acquired an iPad two years ago and I now do everything digitally – sketches, prints, even some collaborations. I never thought I would end up drawing this way because I've always considered myself a 'technophobe', but I decided to try it... Procreate is a very complete and intuitive app. There are still things that could be improved, but that will come. I find it comfortable and versatile to use, but I must admit I also miss traditional drawing techniques.

Do you think it's important for a tattoo artist to be able to draw and paint creatively?

In my opinion, yes. It's important for tattoo artists to be able to create their own designs and develop their imagination. I respect the skills of the realism artists – it's obviously incredibly hard to transfer all those textures and details to the skin – and I certainly recognise impressive work when I see it (Steve Butcher, for example!) but, speaking personally, I do place a very high value on individual creativity.

What is your favorite subject to draw or tattoo?

Animals, mythical beasts, anything crazy or amusing...





Do your fellow artists – residents and guests – influence your work?

I feel I can really count on my resident artists and guests to push things to a higher level. Artists such as Daniels Bauti, Xuama, Buffoneti, Jimmy Lajnen, Cayokun, Scone – and many more – have passed through this studio and yes, they constantly inspire me. My work is also influenced by everything I come across in my travels. That's why I like being a guest artist too – at Seven Lakes (Varese, Italy), Old Capital (Berne, Switzerland), Positive Vibration (Aradeo, Italy) and 10 Thousand Foxes (New York).

Which other artists inspire you?

Right now, there's an infinity of artists to discover on the internet. And not just tattooists. I get inspired by illustrators, sculptors... anything. But if you were to ask me for tattooists' names, the artists who consistently amaze me are Victor Chil, Jamie Ris, Logan, Nicklas Wong, Timmy B, Lindsay Baker, James Tex, Peter Lagergren, Vlady (of Positive Vibration), Shige, Calle Corson and Kenji Shigehara.

Tell us about your local tattoo scene.

As with everywhere, the number of studios has increased exponentially, as well as the number of people tattooing from home or in a more underground way. And that means there's a lot of competition. But BirdHouse Tattoo is a private studio; we do not need walk-ins to survive; we have a solid clientele and the people who contact us are usually seeking work from a specific artist. As for the wider Spanish scene, I think realism is definitely the most popular genre at the moment, as it is pretty much everywhere, but traditional, Oriental, New School, dotwork and neo-traditional are all popular too. We have great artists in every tattoo style.





How do you think the tattoo world will develop in the future? What does the industry need?

I don't know, but if it continues like it is at the moment, it will all go to hell. The industry has to get serious and look to the future. Tattooing needs to be regulated in some way, but there are also some nonsense rules here in Spain that need changing. And we really need to solve the problem of bad inks.

What's been the highlight of your career so far?

When I'd been tattooing for three or four years, I started travelling and meeting people. I was only 24 years old, there were so many things I wanted to do, and I knew it was all only just starting... That was a really good time.



What advice would you give someone who is learning to tattoo?

Take it very seriously. Know what your limits are before making a mess of someone's skin. Draw a lot, and work hard. If possible, learn in a professional studio. But above all, be very very humble.

BirdHouse Tattoo

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Móstoles

Madrid

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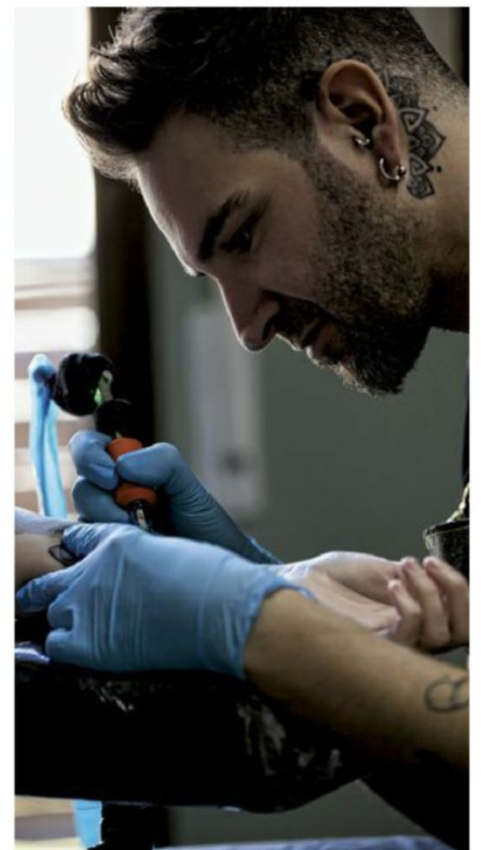
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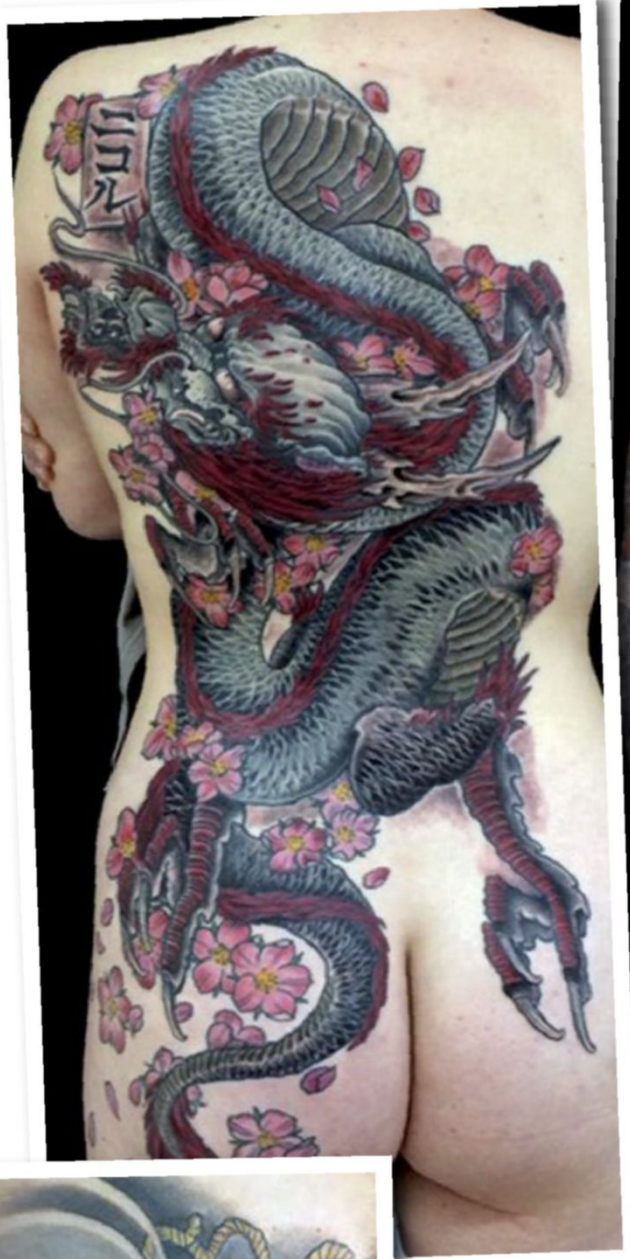
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V TATTOO (SPAIN)

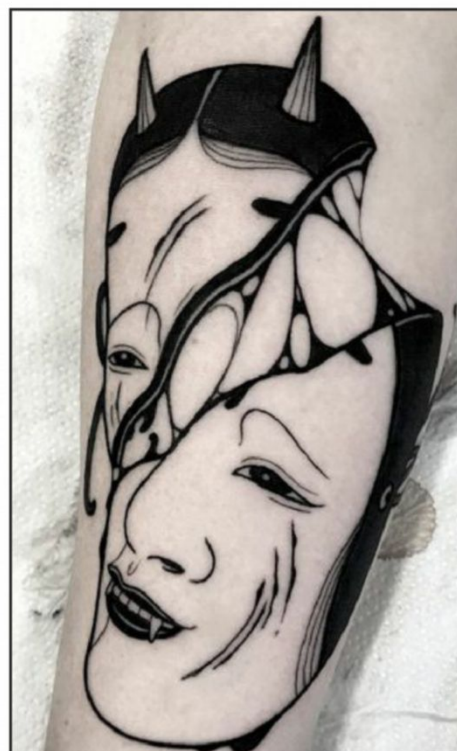
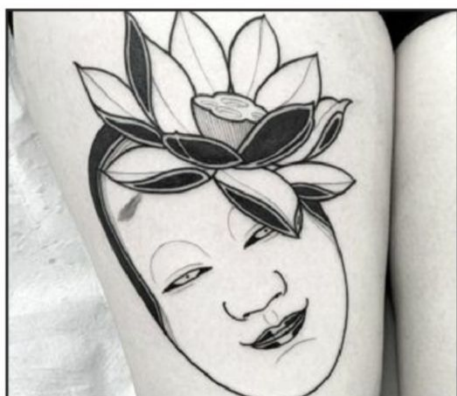


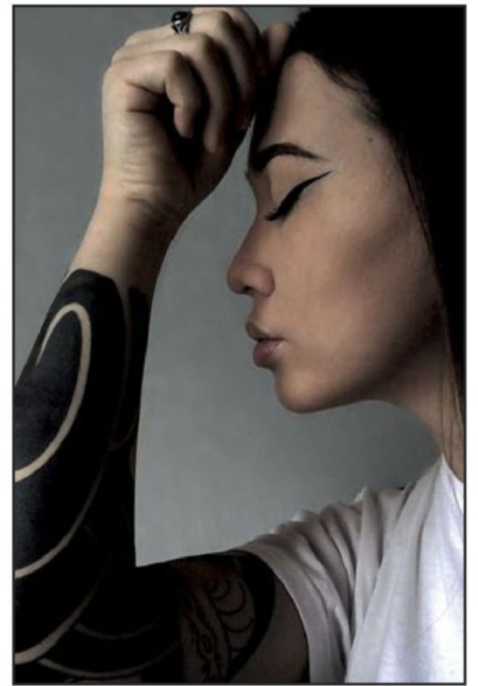


H OSCAR LOVE



Oscar Hove is an interesting man. He has a passion for Japanese masks, but the Far East was a source of inspiration in his life long before he ever picked up a tattoo machine. He's been a Jiu Jitsu practitioner for many years and this ancient martial art has also, indirectly, affected the way he tattoos – because a while back he sustained an injury that caused permanent damage to one of his fingers. “I can't close my hand properly,” he tells me, “and some days it's very painful, so I've had to move away from using coils.” That's how our conversation began, and I knew straight away he'd have some fascinating things to say...





Oscar is from Barcelona. He began tattooing just seven years ago, and he considers his art to be still very much in its infancy. Nevertheless, he's already a studio owner. "I co-own Ondo Tattoo," he tells me, "along with some very old friends. I'd actually been tattooing for only two years when they asked me to join them. I was saving for my own shop, and they decided to expand their business and invited me to come on board." Oscar then laughs and adds, "But I think they only wanted me for my money!"

Originally Oscar was a graphic designer. His qualifications include a master's degree in motion graphics. "I was one of the first people in Barcelona to do that course, so I was very lucky," he says. "I was a freelance graphic designer for a time, but I was working from home and communicating with everyone by email, so it was quite a lonely existence. When I started to tattoo, that's one of the things I really loved about it. The face-to-face contact with people. It's really what persuaded me this was the career for me. Of course sometimes that connection with customers isn't so good," Oscar says with a smile, "but many of the people I've tattooed have become great friends of mine. It's one of the special things about this job."

"When I first started to tattoo," he continues, "I was determined not to use my graphics training. I wanted to work very traditionally, and learn using the old school methods, and I decided I would only draw with a pencil. But then a couple of years ago I suddenly thought, 'I have all this education - all this



understanding of design that is naturally seeping into my work anyway – so why don't I just let it flow? After all, it's part of me...' I don't know where my idea to hold myself back came from. Perhaps it's because tattooing is such an old tradition that I somehow felt it had to be done in a traditional way. But tattooing is moving on so fast! I realised it was like trying to draw a straight line without using a ruler. It made no sense."



Sometimes the simplest images are the hardest to draw, but Oscar's lines are clinically smooth and his symmetry has pinpoint accuracy. There are no extraneous details in his beautiful designs; they are elegant and restrained, and could even be described as minimal. When I comment on this, Oscar tells me, "Really I'm just lazy. That's the only reason my style is like it is!" He laughs out loud. "OK,

maybe that's not entirely true, but it's certainly part of it. Seriously, I can't tattoo for too many hours at a time. And I need to see results quickly, because I need to know that I am making good progress. I've always been like that. I used to do graffiti, and when I was painting a wall my friends would often say, 'This isn't a train! It's a wall! You can slow down!' But I just don't have any patience. So over time I would add fewer details and fewer shadows, until I had no shadows at all. Of course now I am doing larger tattoo projects, I have to accept that they're not going to get done in a day, so I've had to develop a different state of mind. But I still feel the need to be quick."



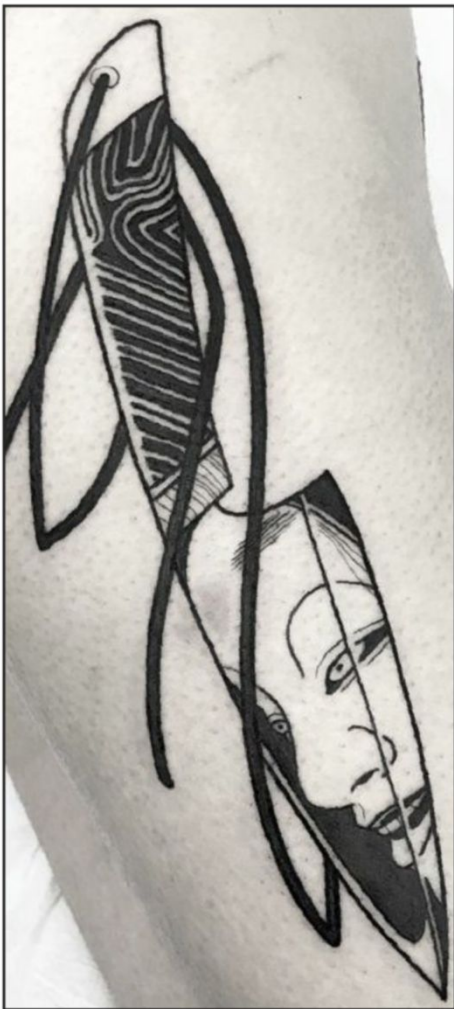
Oscar's simplistic, stripped-back graphic approach is refreshing. His masks have an eerie, haunting quality that seems to be in complete contrast to the multi-colour, multi-genre tattoos that are so popular right now. Other artists might choose to throw in everything including the kitchen sink; Oscar does the polar opposite of that.

"Yes," Oscar agrees, "and that's an interesting point. Most of the guys at Ondo came from the graffiti scene, and we all started to produce tattoos in a New School style. We wanted to escape traditional tattooing and make ourselves stand out as really creative tattooers. We were always looking to interpret our subjects in a new and unusual way. But New School, with all its detail, was in complete contrast to the graphic design mentality I was used to. I came from a 'less is more' philosophy, so the transition was always going to be difficult for me. I decided just to allow myself to be myself and go back to a more naturally comfortable style."



Oscar travelled to Japan two years ago, and that's when his love affair with Japanese art really began. "One thing I noticed was that Japanese tattoos are actually far simpler than our Western interpretations of them. I bought a lot of books and started to draw some of the images. I posted my drawings on Instagram and it wasn't long before people began to ask if I could tattoo them. There wasn't a pivotal moment when I decided to switch to doing Japanese-style tattoos; my work just migrated in that direction as more and more people became interested in having something from me in that style."





With their perfect placement and solid line work, I wasn't surprised to learn that Oscar's tattoos are nearly always stencilled on. "Most of my work needs to have that absolute accuracy, but if I'm doing something more organic or asymmetrical - like a hannya from the side, for instance - I will freehand it and make it flow with the contours of the body." Oscar's graphics training is very much in evidence as he talks about the way he makes his tattoos look so good. "Symmetrical faces, for example, can look a little flat, and lacking in dynamics, so I might add a strong background or play with other elements that will lead the eye around the composition. I guess it's fair to say that if I'm designing something on a large scale, like a sleeve, my approach is definitely that of a graphic designer - not a Japanese tattooist."



Oscar has a beautiful tattooing philosophy. "I always work with love," he tells me. "Without love, it will never be a successful tattoo." I ask if he would ever refuse to tattoo a customer if the chemistry didn't feel right. "Yes," he replies, "that's something I do quite often. As an artist, if you don't feel it, it's never going to work. That's why I'm so glad I work in my own shop. Nobody's going to make me do a tattoo I don't want to do. And I don't have to work for a boss who's only concerned about making money."





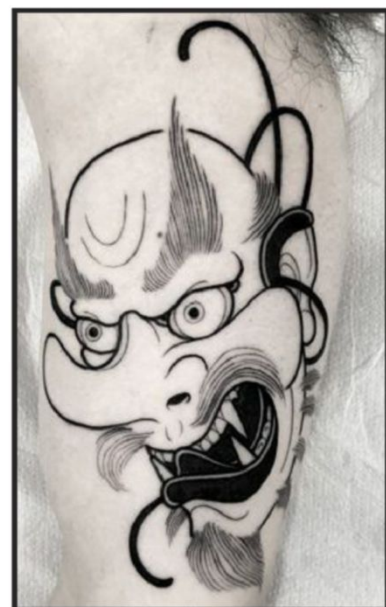
"A lot of customers seem to think they can demand a particular kind of tattoo from you," he continues, "regardless of your personal style. I sometimes wonder if that's a peculiarly Spanish thing? Even my friends - who all know what I do - will tell me how much they love my tattoos and then come and ask me for lettering or a realistic portrait! Actually, around 80% of my customers come from outside Barcelona. The fact that they come here just to get tattooed by me feels like a real honour, especially as we have so many great artists here." Oscar pauses, then says, "You know, I think this is one of the best times of my life right now!"



Oscar's speciality is Japanese masks. But what is it about them that he finds so irresistible? "You can look at a mask in two ways," he explains. "From the outside looking in, or from the inside looking out. Looked at from the outside, a mask might appear very scary... but on the inside, its wearer might be a sweet child. I love that idea - the thought that you can hide your own personality within the image of the mask. Masks are my passion. In fact I'm going to Japan again soon and I hope to buy more while I'm there."

I ask Oscar if he thinks he will ever tire of tattooing masks. "Masks are always going to be very special for me. I have no idea how many I've tattooed! The problem is, people always ask for a hannya – despite the fact that there are hundreds of others to choose from, and thousands of different ways in which they can be represented. I believe it's up to us, as tattooists, to educate our customers. We have to show people what we can do if we want to change and grow as artists. Maybe there will be a time when I need to move on from tattooing masks. I do like to take a little break from them now and then. Sometimes I just need to escape from myself..."

Oscar finds collaborative tattooing very exciting. "I enjoy working on sleeves with the other Ondo artists," he tells me. "It's good to release your ego and allow others to influence your creative process because this helps your own work to expand and develop." Ondo is a happy studio. There is clearly a high level of mutual respect and appreciation between the artists, and a real sense of family. "We're definitely inspired by each other. We're not precious about our own individual work. We all want to advance together. If we find a new way of doing something we'll share it, and we always give each other advice and constructive criticism. We discuss our work before we post it on Instagram. We're all OK with the fact that sometimes it's better not to post a tattoo if we're not all happy with it, because each piece represents all of us."



Oscar has self-published a book of masks, and he has many other creative projects on the go to keep himself busy outside of tattooing. He feels all his artistic activities facilitate and energise each other. "I have done sculpture and I would very much like to do something with jewellery. I also design fabrics; in fact I will soon have a new kimono coming out. Really, I consider myself to be an artist who works in many different disciplines, one of which just happens to be tattooing."

As our conversation draws to a close, I ask Oscar if there is any final comment he would like to make about tattooing, or any advice he would like to pass on to up-and-coming artists. He replies, in typically compassionate style, "Only tattoo if you really feel it, and do it with love. It can be hard to turn away work, but if it's not right for you, let it go to someone else."

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www.insidertattoo.com

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Tel no: 0191 565 6665
Contact through Facebook:
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Blacklanternstudio@gmail.com
FB: black lantern tattoo studio

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8TB
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www.crookedclawtattoo.com

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Instagram: @electric.kicks.crew

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Tel no: 01226 779 595
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www.nigelkurt.com

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www.brightontattoo.com

2nd-3rd March
Tattoo Tea Party
The Trafford Centre
Stretford
Manchester
www.tattooteaparty.com

30th – 31st March
Scottish Tattoo Convention
Edinburgh Corn Exchange
10 New Market Rd
Edinburgh EH14 1RJ
www.scottishtattooconvention.net

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
www.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

15th-16th June
UK Tattoo Fest
Marshall Arena, Stadium Way West,
Milton Keynes MK1 1ST
<https://uktattooofest.co.uk>

16th-18th August
Blackpool Tatcon
Norbreck Castle Hotel
Queen's Promenade
Blackpool, Lancashire FY2 9AA
www.tatconblackpool.co.uk/

27th-29th September
London Tattoo Convention
Tobacco Dock, London, UK
www.thelondontattooconvention.com

OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

8th-10th February
Milan Tattoo Convention
Fiera Milano City
Via Gattamelata Gate 13,
Milan 20149,
Italy
www.milanotattooconvention.it

15-17 February
Mondial du Tatouage
Parc de la Villette
211, avenue Jean Jaurès
75019 Paris
www.mondialdutatouage.com/

15-17 February
6th Intl. Tattoo Expo Maastricht
MECC Maastricht
Forum 100
6229 GV Maastricht
Netherlands
www.tattooexpo.eu

1st-3rd March
Ptak Warsaw Expo
Aleja Katowicka 62,
05-830 Nadarzyn,
Poland
www.tattoodays.pl

March 8th-10th
Pittsburgh Tattoo Expo
Sheraton Pittsburgh Hotel at Station Square
300 W Station Square Dr Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania 15219
United States
www.pittsburghtattooexpo.com

9th-10th March
True Love Tattoo Convention
Départ
Kortrijk Weide 6, 8500 Kortrijk
Belgium
www.truelovetattooconvention.be

9th-10th March
Rotterdam Builders
Tattoo Convention
Maassilo, Maashaven Zuidzijde 1-2, 3081 AE
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
www.unitedconventions.com

22nd-24th March
Taiwan Kaohsiung International
Tattoo Convention
International Convention Center Kaohsiung
274, Zhongzheng 4th Rd.
Yancheng Dist. Kaohsiung,
Taiwan
www.tattoo.org.tw

5th-7th April
Singapore Ink Show
Suntec Singapore Exhibition Centre
1 Raffles Boulevard, Suntec City,
Singapore
www.sginkshow.com

10th-12th May
Athens International Tattoo Con-
vention
Olympic Tae Kwon Do and Handball Centre
Palaio Faliro,
Greece
www.athenstattooconvention.gr

28th-30th June
San Diego Tattoo Invitational
Golden Hall
202 C St, San Diego,
CA 92101,
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