

total tattoo



RICH HARRIS

Award-winning collage tattoo designs

LOYAL TO THE COIL

Coil Machines... what's the buzz about?

ACHILLEAS ABER

Beautiful neo-traditional from Greece

TJ FAIRFAX

Big Lurkio talks linework

MARK JELLMAN

In pursuit of perfection

GRAHAM HUMPHREYS

The fine art of classic horror

DE ART

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All correspondence should be sent to
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EDITORIAL 185



Like so many people these days, I find my life becoming increasingly more congested with the demands of work, family, and friends. I love my life and feel privileged to spend it around so many fantastic people, but there are also times when I would just like to sit alone and be still for a while.

It seems that in our pursuit of success, achievement and happiness, many of us are losing sight of what's really important. Tattooists nowadays can find themselves under incredible increasing pressure - to keep busy, to keep the money coming in, and of course to perform. Many are driven to search constantly for new creative directions and produce ever more flawless art. As they say (though some would disagree), "You're only as good as your last tattoo." Just one unhappy customer, and it can be all over social media in no time.

We're living in a social media maelstrom. Tech is driving our lives. There appears to be no off switch. If you take a break from your phone, you might miss that all-important message. And no matter how tired you are at the end of the day, you still have to upload all your latest photos...

Everyone lives their lives in different ways, at a different pace. Some thrive on pressure; others prefer to take it more gently; for most, it varies from day to day, or even from moment to moment. It's when the pressure becomes too much to bear that the problems begin.

All I can suggest is that we all take a little more time to step back and focus on what's good in our lives. Be kind to yourself, even allow yourself to fail from time to time (after all, that's how we learn), and remember there's a lot more to life than work.

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NEWS & REVIEWS



Send your news, studio announcements, books or products for review, and items of general curiosity and intrigue for the tattoo cognoscenti to: **NEWS, TOTAL TATTOO MAGAZINE, 96 Glendenning Road, Norwich NR1 1YN** (totaltattoo@totaltattoo.co.uk)

NEW WELSH LEGISLATION



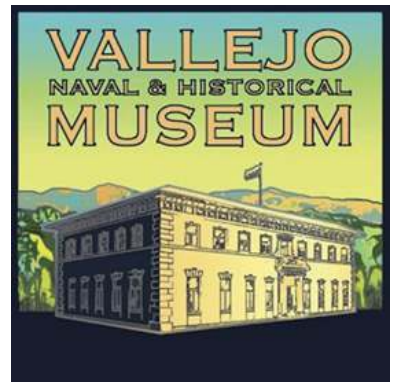
In April this year, important new legislation comes into effect for tattooists and tattoo premises in Wales. A new licensing scheme is being introduced under Part 4 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 for all practitioners carrying out so-called 'Special Procedures' – an umbrella term covering piercing, acupuncture and certain beauty treatments as well as tattooing.

The new legislation requires all tattooists to be individually licensed, and it will be an offence to tattoo without such a licence. Tattooists will need to demonstrate a knowledge of safe

and hygienic working practices in order to obtain their licence, and they will also need to show that they keep proper records, and that their premises and equipment meet certain standards. Licences will be renewable every three years (and provision has also been made for the granting of temporary seven-day licences for tattooists working conventions).

There will be a 'grace period' while the new legislation is introduced, but once it is in force, any breaches could result in prosecution. Further information on the new regulations is available from all local councils in Wales.

TATTOOED AND TENACIOUS



Until the end of this month, the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum in the San Francisco Bay Area is hosting 'Tattooed and Tenacious' – an exhibition all about tattooed women in California. Featuring both historical photos and contemporary pictures by Vallejo photographer S.N. Jacobson, the show also includes much fascinating material covering such themes as 'Tattooed Ladies of the Circus', 'Native Ink' and 'Wealthy Women and the Tattoo Craze', plus little known stories of female tattoo artists across the decades. The exhibition runs until 29th February. Check out the museum website: vallejomuseum.net



EU INK BAN?

A couple of years ago, in response to concerns about the potentially hazardous substances that have been found in some inks, the European Commission asked ECHA (the European Chemicals Agency) to carry out an in-depth investigation of all the chemicals in tattoo inks and permanent make-up, and assess the risks they pose to human health. We first reported on this in Total Tattoo Issue 161.

The whole investigation covered more than 4,000 substances. According to a recent ECHA press release, "Some of these substances are already restricted under the EU's Cosmetic Products Regulation and are not allowed to be used on the skin. They are also, therefore, not safe to be injected under the skin either."



- Proposals have now been made to restrict the use of those chemicals ECHA deems to be hazardous – and controversially the list includes Pigment Blue 15 and Pigment Green 7, which are key ingredients of tattoo inks.
- ECHA has, however, recommended a two-year transitional period before imposing any ban. This would allow ink manufacturers to find safer alternatives whilst ensuring the availability of green and blue tattoo inks in the meantime.
- Reassuringly, ECHA emphasises that it is "not proposing to ban tattoos, nor all green and blue tattooing colours."
- ECHA's proposals are due to be discussed by EU member states this month with a view to introducing new legislation. As we go to print, it is unclear what role the UK will play in these discussions (although it has been suggested that, post-Brexit, new legislation in the UK is likely to mirror that in the EU).

Many tattooists are, understandably, concerned (and the situation hasn't been helped by the scare stories that have appeared in the press and on social media). In Germany, Andreas Coenen and Jörn Elsenbruch have set up an online petition which has already garnered massive support, amassing 100,000 signatures in just a few days.



USEFUL LINKS:

Video about German petition (in German):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMRrbdMNUGA

Petition campaign brochure (in English):
tattoofarben.info/images/TattooColors_Brochure_EN.pdf

To read the ECHA press release, head to:
echa.europa.eu/-/echa-is-working-to-make-tattooing-inks-safer

For background information, plus lots of other links, head to:

echa.europa.eu/hot-topics/tattoo-inks

Here is a link to information about the implications of EU chemicals legislation for UK businesses post-Brexit:

echa.europa.eu/uk-withdrawal-from-the-eu

If you are at all worried about the chemicals that might be in your tattoos, ask your tattooist for information and advice, and if you have specific health concerns, do talk to a medical professional. (This could be especially important if you are considering laser tattoo removal, which breaks the ink down into its constituent parts and circulates it around the body.) If you are getting a new tattoo, you might think about keeping a note of the tattoo ink your artist used, just in case you develop a reaction afterwards. And do of course contact a medical professional without delay if you experience any unusual symptoms or become unwell as a result of being tattooed.

R.I.P. LEE CLEMENTS



We were shocked and deeply saddened to hear of the death of well-known and much-loved Welsh tattooist Lee Clements on 23rd December 2019.

Lee, who owned the Chimera Tattoo Emporium in Barry, was just 42 years old.

Tattooing was his passion. He was the Welsh representative for the British Tattoo Artists Federation, and he made a major contribution to the industry by working closely with the Welsh Government to push for new, improved health and hygiene regulations. Thanks in large part to Lee's campaigning efforts, and his expert input, enhanced legislation for tattooists and tattoo businesses will be brought into effect in Wales this year.

[See News item on previous page]

Famously, Lee was brought in to advise on the tattoo scenes in the 'Gavin and Stacey' 2019 Christmas special. He taught star and co-writer Ruth Jones (Nessa) how to tattoo – or at least how to look like she was tattooing! – and provided studio equipment for the scene. Lee of course would have preferred it if 'Nessa' had agreed to wear gloves...

Lee tattooed a number of celebrity clients, including New Zealand All Black Jonah Lomu, Welsh international rugby player John Yapp, boxer Lee Selby, footballer David Cotterill, and Hollyoaks actor Sarah Jayne Dunn. He and Jonah Lomu struck up a close friendship. Lee would fly to various locations around the world to tattoo Jonah, and Jonah would often come to stay at Lee's house. Lee's brother tells a lovely story of Jonah coming to open Lee's previous studio, Chameleon, and choosing to sleep on Lee's sofa rather than staying in a hotel!

Lee loved creating art – whether on paper, canvas or skin. He was massively into Warhammer, entering his hand-painted figurines into international competitions and helping to run a local club. He was also a passionate rugby fan, supporting Cardiff Blues; the dress code for his funeral on 22nd January was “something blue or Blues-related”.

A devoted dad-of-three, Lee will be much missed by all his family and friends, and our thoughts are with them at this very sad time.

Donations can be made in Lee's memory to mental health charity Mind via [justgiving.com/fundraising/leejohnclements](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/leejohnclements)

SKINDIGENOUS



We recently came across 'Skindigenous', a series of half-hour documentaries on the art and craft of tattooing as practised by indigenous peoples around the globe. These fascinating programmes air on Canadian channel APTN (the Aboriginal People's Television Network), which broadcasts in Canada's northern territories. Each episode explores the traditions, techniques and symbology of a different tattoo culture, and also investigates how it merges with the modern tattoo scene. There are episodes featuring Canadian locations such as British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland as well as programmes on Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, Samoa, New Zealand... the list goes on. The second series has just gone on air in Canada. Check out the Skindigenous YouTube channel.



STOLEN PORTFOLIO



Tattooist Jesus Gonzales of Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, was stunned when thieves calmly walked out of his studio carrying his portfolio. His main concern is that his designs might now be used fraudulently to promote the work of a scratcher, conning or even harming unwary customers, and he urges anyone going to a tattooist whose work they don't know to be very careful – and ask plenty of questions – before committing to getting inked by them. And of course if you know what might have happened to the stolen portfolio, Jesus would love to hear from you.

TURN IT OFF

We've heard about a new tattoo product that could have far-reaching implications for the industry.

INQUE is the brand name of a new tattoo ink which, unlike conventional inks, cannot be absorbed into the bloodstream and gradually transported away by the body's lymph system. Its makers claim that INQUE is therefore safer (because your entire tattoo stays put) and also provides "unmatched vibrancy" (because the colours do not deteriorate). But, according to all the publicity, the big selling point is that INQUE tattoos can be permanently blanked out with just one pass of a low power laser if the wearer no longer wants them. Tattoo removal becomes a quick, painless procedure – in contrast to ordinary lasering – and the new removal technology has been given the trade name BLANQUE.

Conventional laser tattoo removal involves shattering the ink particles, then letting the body absorb and dispose of everything via the bloodstream and lymph nodes. The new BLANQUE process works in an entirely different way. INQUE's colour is contained within a structure that is best described as a mass of tiny capsules. The laser triggers a chemical reaction within each separate capsule that "turns off" the colour inside. The INQUE itself stays right where it is, but is now invisible. Nothing enters the bloodstream, and there is no pain, scarring or skin trauma.

According to the publicity, INQUE is being launched in "sought-after retail locations" across the USA, in brand new "sophisticated, tech-infused" premises that are emphatically "NOT tattoo parlours". If you're curious, check out inqueme.com/thinkbig/



NEW STUDIO

Our old friend Dan Stone has emailed to let us know that he'll be opening his new studio on 8th February, R2 Tattoos in Scarborough. He told us, "I'm going for a very different look to the studio this time around and I guarantee it'll unlike any other studio you've seen." 10% of his first four weeks' takings will be donated to MIND and the Motor Neurone Disease Association. Dan can be found at 16 Northway, Scarborough, North Yorkshire. Telephone: 01723 369243

IRAQI PROTEST TATTOOS

Take a look at this eye-opening photo story about a young Iraqi tattooist named Maram – aged just 16 – inking anti-government demonstrators in a tent in Tahrir Square, Baghdad: en.tempo.co/photo/77191/young-tattooist-breaks-barriers-by-inking-iraqi-protesters



INCENSE GIVEAWAY

Tattooist David Barclay has just launched a beautiful new incense product. The duKana Incense Kit comprises a decorative wooden holder, a printed lighter, and 10 incense sticks, all in a special gift box - made with love.



David has kindly given us two duKana Incense Kits to GIVE AWAY FREE to Total Tattoo readers.

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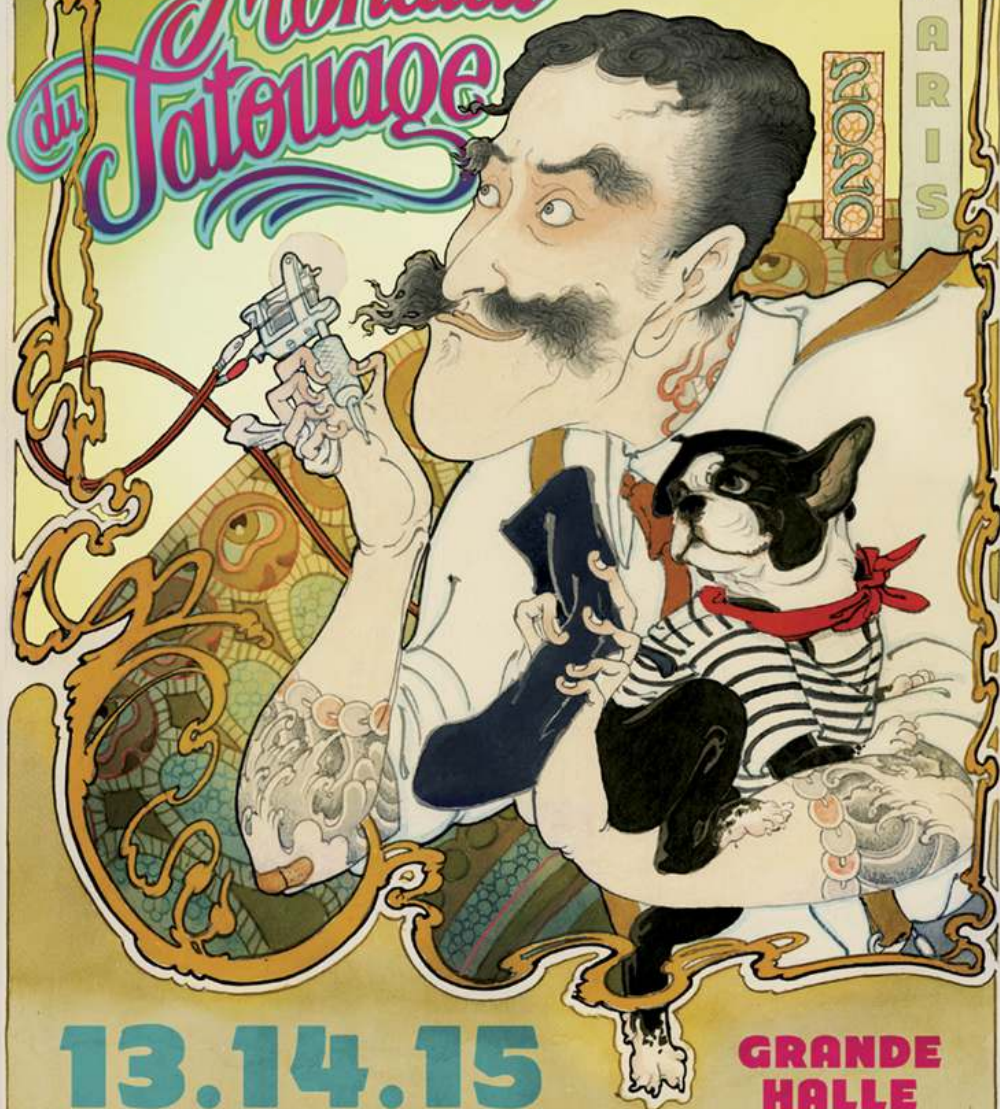
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'I UPPED MY GAME ON SOCIAL MEDIA. IT'S NOT ENOUGH JUST TO BE GOOD AT TATTOOING'

RICH HARRIS



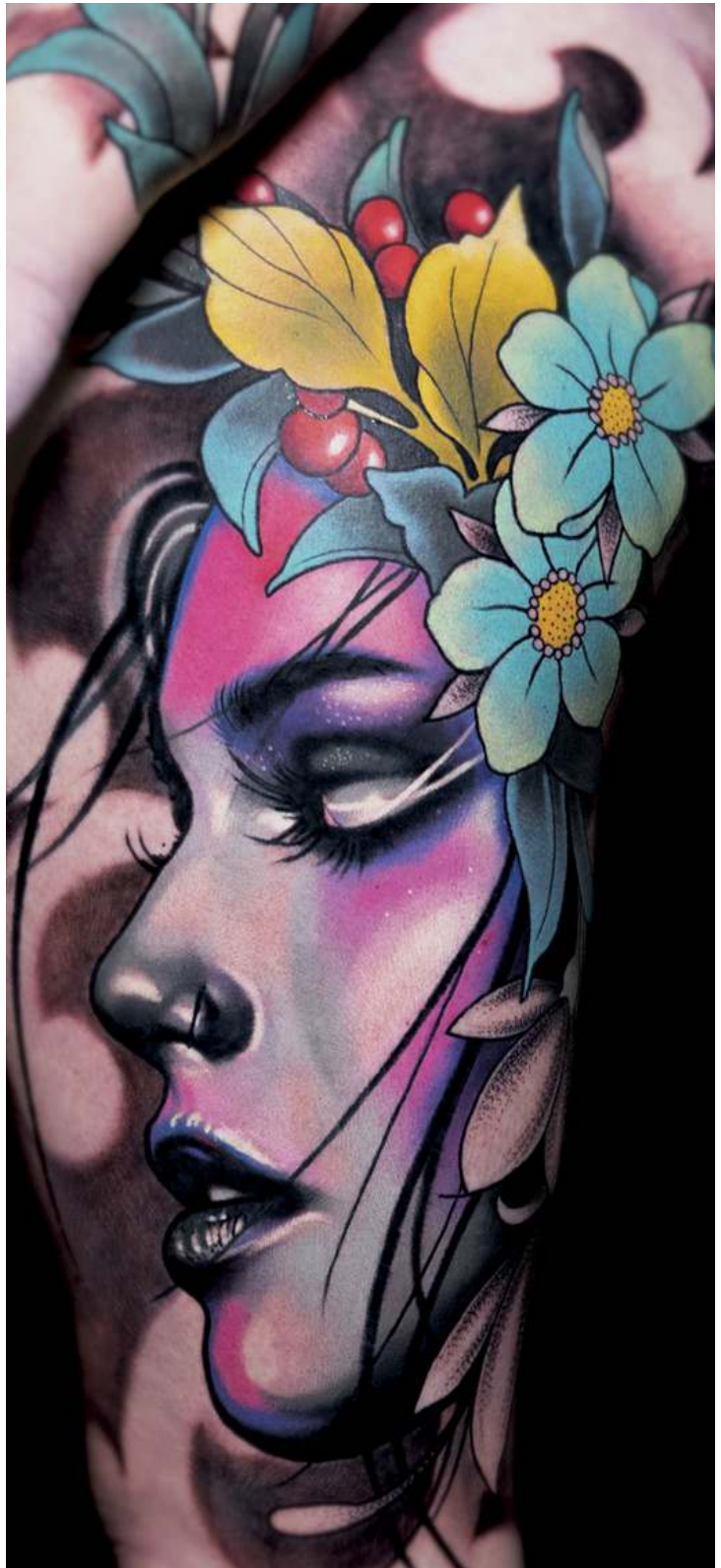
Rich Harris has been tattooing for just seven years but his achievements in that short time have been considerable, including opening a killer studio (Dark Horse Collective in Sutton Coldfield) and taking Best of Show at the 2019 London Tattoo Convention for a stunning collaborative piece.

The idea of becoming a tattoo artist first came to Rich when he was just 10 years old. School friends would ask him to draw superhero designs on them in biro. Such was his ambition, he even wrote to Marvel, hoping to become a comic book artist. But it wasn't until the age of 33 that he finally picked up a tattoo machine.

Rich did a lot of other things in between. "I've been DJing since I was 19," he tells me. "I had a record label, which is still going, and I also used to have a t-shirt business. I've always been a bit of an entrepreneur. I did a window cleaning round for a couple of months then I was offered the chance to buy it, so I borrowed the money from my folks and now it's really massive. In truth, it's such a good income it's hard to let go of! I've always had my fingers in lots of pies."

"I've done jobs where I've been working for other people," Rich continues, "but I don't like being told what to do. I obviously had to work in other people's tattoo shops at the beginning and I used to have to bite my lip, especially when I saw things happening that I thought were wrong." Rich began his tattoo career working in a friend's shop, drawing designs for the tattooists to execute. "I worked there three days a week, and washed windows the other three days," he recalls.

"And then finally I thought fuck it, I should really give tattooing a go. I was frustrated with music production, because I had to use an engineer to get the quality good enough for the top DJs to play my tracks, and I thought at least with tattooing I could do it all myself! There was a guy who'd tattooed all my mates when we were in our teens and he was still tattooing people and driving a nice car even though his work was really bad. I thought at least I'll never be as bad as him, and that's what gave me the confidence to get started."





Most people struggle when they first learn to tattoo, and I was interested to know which aspects Rich found particularly challenging. It turns out it was the sheer volume of knowledge that he needed to absorb. He admits he found it overwhelming. "It blew my mind," he says. "Needle selection for instance. A five round liner, a three round liner tight, a mag soft edge... what's the bloody difference? But like most things, you just have to get right into it and learn as much as you possibly can."



"I was forever asking questions," Rich continues, "but I was working alongside five artists and they'd each give me different answers. I soon discovered that the only real answer is to do shitloads of tattoos and just try absolutely everything. You need to tattoo all the time. It's only when you've mastered the basics, and you've got an understanding of what you're doing and why, that you can start looking for a style and really make plans for your journey into tattooing. You have to get good before you can set yourself any other goals. Then you can begin to focus on how you're going to make yourself stand out. Every aspect of your work is important – including photography and customer care. I know loads of amazing artists who do incredible work but struggle to communicate with their customers."

Although it's hard to believe after his success at the London Convention last year, there was a time when Rich was still trying to get into this prestigious event. "I had to really look at myself," he confesses, "and ask why. That was when I realised my photographs weren't as good as other people's. Once I'd identified the weak spot, I could begin to look at how to improve. I upped my game on social media, and polished how I present myself. It's not enough to just be good at tattooing any more."

Rich certainly has a drive to succeed, and he acknowledges he's received some valuable help and inspiration along the way. "David Corden was a massive influence. And Mat Lapping. I loved the comic book elements in Mat's work, and the unbelievable finish of David's tattoos. And I followed Michelle Maddison really closely. At the time she was just an apprentice, like me, but she was amazing! In different ways, they all gave me the confidence to move on. It was with their words ringing in my ears that I decided the time was right to open Dark Horse with Jamie [Lee Knott]. I didn't want to be one of those people who say they're going to do something for years and then never get around to it."





Rich and Jamie Lee Knott opened Dark Horse Collective in the summer of 2014. Since then, the studio has been home to many top class resident artists and guests. "Jamie and I have the same work ethic," Rich tells me, "and we share the same passion and commitment. We get on really well, even though we're very different people with different tastes and interests."

"We've got a really good team here now," Rich continues. "The ethos at Dark Horse is for us all to be completely honest and open with each other, because we want everyone to grow and be the best they can be. Constructive criticism is important – not to batter people down, but to build them up. I often ask for other people's opinions, even on something like the placement of a stencil, in case I'm missing something. We all continue to learn from day to day. It's all about helping each other to develop as artists, and it's also about getting even better at all the other aspects, like client care and booking appointments. We improved our booking-in system recently and fine-tuned some of the others ways we run the studio and we're firing on all cylinders now! As a studio owner, you need to notice when your artists are down. If your artists are happy, they will in turn look after their customers, and it all leads to a happy shop."



Rich is keen to keep moving forward and progressing in his own work. "I see artists who have had their boom period, opened their studio, stopped going to conventions and slowly stagnated... doing the same things, stuck in a rut. So I try to constantly evolve and keep my work fresh," Rich continues. "I like to analyse what other people are doing, because this often sparks new ideas and ways of thinking. I've attended a lot of seminars; you don't realise it at the time, but little gems of knowledge go into your subconscious, and you find yourself being influenced without really knowing it. I'm very critical of my own work and I'll listen to anybody who is prepared to critique it for me."



It's always interesting to ask tattooists how they themselves would describe the tattoos they create, and what they believe makes them stand out – although it's often a difficult question to answer. "I'm so attached to my work," Rich says, "that I don't know if it even does stand out." But after some thought he adds, "I certainly love to use big bold chunky lines. Like a lot of tattooists, I believe it's good to be able to see what the design is from the other side of the street, because then you know it's going to hold up in years to come. I don't like gimmicky tattoos. Tattooing is an art, with traditional values. I hope my work will stand the test of time."

We talk about the similarities between creating a killer tattoo that really pops and a classic club tune that will fill a dance floor. "Both music and tattooing have their surefire hits," Rich says, "The snare drum from Michael Jackson's Billy Jean for instance. If I take that and use it, it's instantly recognisable. It has a familiarity that people can identify with. It's the same with a tattoo. If you use a familiar image like a female face, with attractive colours, chances are people will feel comfortable with it and will like the finished tattoo."

And how about narrative or symbolic meanings? Does Rich embed these in his designs? "Yes, if the client comes to me in advance and we devise a plan to incorporate certain elements then that's fine. Otherwise it's just an image that looks cool, and that's also fine!"

For Rich, scale is important in a successful tattoo. "There's no point in making a tattoo too small. I've seen it so often at shows. An artist only has limited time to finish a piece, so you get an amazing design that floats about in a sea of flesh. The artist photographs it close-up so it looks incredible, but it's an odd-fitting shape in the middle of a thigh and it kind of ruins the whole leg. That kind of thing is a major bugbear for me."





"As tattooists, it's our responsibility to advise our customers why a tattoo will or won't work. Our customers come to us because they expect us to do a great job - so we have to give ourselves every opportunity to do the best we can. Sometimes that means telling them why they can't have what they want." And sometimes it means taking a step back and reassessing mid-tattoo. "If things aren't going to plan," Rich continues, "or if I start to feel my design isn't as good as it could be, I usually stop when I reach a suitable point and re-book the appointment so I can re-design the tattoo. Take yourself away, give yourself a rest, and your subconscious will work on it for you. Usually the solution will present itself. Sometimes I just go home early and literally sleep on it. It's far more important to produce the best tattoo possible than bang out a piece that you're not happy with - just for the sake of a few hours' money. In the long term your client will appreciate it."

It's no surprise to find that Rich is heavily sponsored. "Originally, Jamie helped me a lot with buying some coil machines, but as soon I got my hands on Cheyenne rotary... Jesus! You don't need to tune it, bend the needle, mess with the elastic band. You just plug it in, stick in a cartridge and away you go. They are just so easy! Coils gave me loads of stress. They added a layer of complexity that got in the way of producing a great tattoo. I've been using a Cheyenne rotary for about five years now (and I've been sponsored by them for the last two). I've still got the same clip cord, switch and power supply - that's how durable it is. I never have to lube it or maintain it. It just works."



"As you get older," Rich continues, "you need to look after yourself. When I was doing the window cleaning, my wrists were already hurting. Now I see an osteopath every week because I figure that will extend my working career for years, so it's a good investment. Everything has a part to play. Diet contributes to your sleep, which in turn contributes to your ability to concentrate. And your eyes get tired, and your body aches... If you want to be the best, you need to analyse every aspect of how you work."

Few artists can rival the amount of travelling that Rich does. Competitions and conventions are a major part of his life. Why does he put himself through all this? "Every year I try to whittle the number down!" he admits. "Last year, I only did 10 conventions and five guest spots. The problem is I love the buzz of competing, and I love the fact that my work can go up on stage with the likes of Benjamin Laukis and Jak Connolly and all the guys that I really look up to. Winning doesn't really matter in the great scheme of things, but it's nice to get a little pat on the back. I think it gets quite addictive."



Rich is a major player in Ryan Smith's Kaos Theory Project, in which two or more artists collaborate on large-scale tattoos (he and Ryan took Best of Show at last year's London Tattoo Convention). I ask Rich to tell me about some of the different artists he's worked with. "I've tattooed with Jay Freestyle a couple of times now, and it's a nightmare!" he laughs. "He always does the design the night before and isn't the best at communicating. And he grunts a lot! But I've learnt the most from him. He's got a great knowledge of colour theory and lots of experience. And seriously, it's always a real pleasure to work alongside him. I've collaborated with Jamie [Lee Knott] a few times now, and because we know each other so well, we always get great results. When you're collaborating you have to accept that you work differently, be completely honest with each other, and not take offence. Ryan Smith and I are very similar personalities. We've both been club promoters and DJs, and we've both got a quick mouth and a slow brain! But ultimately you both simply want the best tattoo possible, and so far I've never had a disaster collaboration."

I ask Rich if his competition successes affect his day-to-day work in any way. "No, not really," he tells me. "Nothing really changes. Prices don't go up! I love hanging the trophies on the wall, and customers like to see them too, so it's good for me and good for the studio. But winning at conventions doesn't change the world. It all just comes down to luck on the day..."

@harristattooart

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LILLE

INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION



The 5th International Lille Tattoo Convention in France took place over the weekend of 15th-17th January and was the first show of the year for the Total Tattoo crew.

We'd heard amazing stories about this show, with claims of 15,000 plus visitors – which in these turbulent times seemed almost too good to be true – so we really wanted to find out what was making Lille buck the trend of so many other conventions.



An early start on the Friday morning and we were queuing for the Eurotunnel; a mere 60 miles from Calais saw us pulling up in the ample car park under the Grand Palais exhibition centre in the centre of Lille. Lifts and escalators made the load-in a smooth and simple affair.

Around 400 tattooists had come along to support the show. They were divided over two huge open-plan halls. With so much space to play with, the artist booths (laid out in long rows, interspersed with trade and merchandise stalls) were generously sized, smart and well lit. A large low platformed area was set aside for traditional hand tattooing for long-established artists including Pili Mo'o, Durga

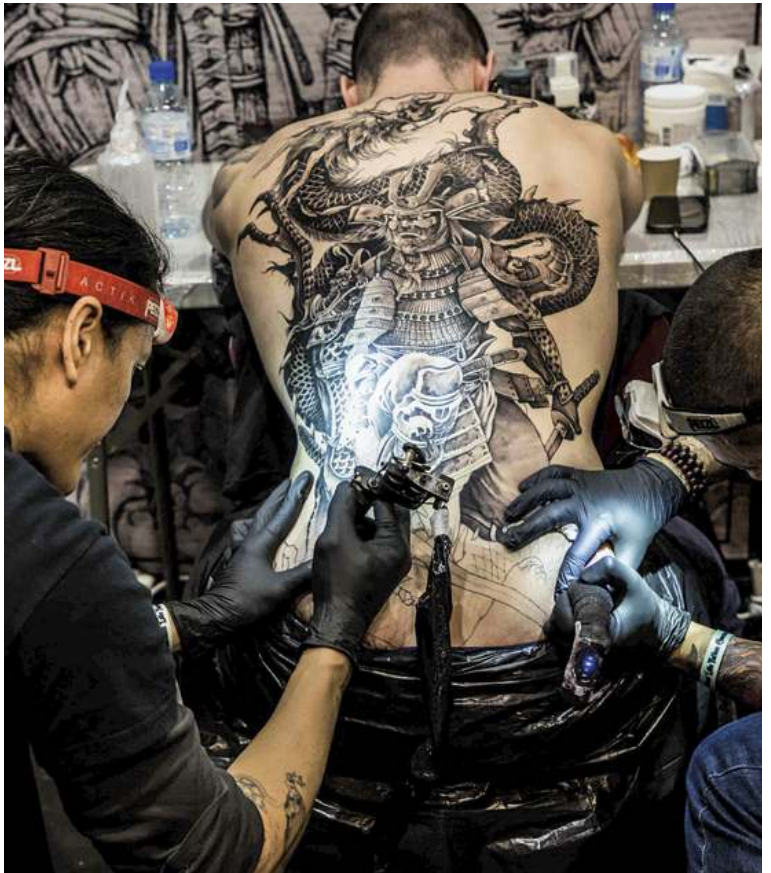


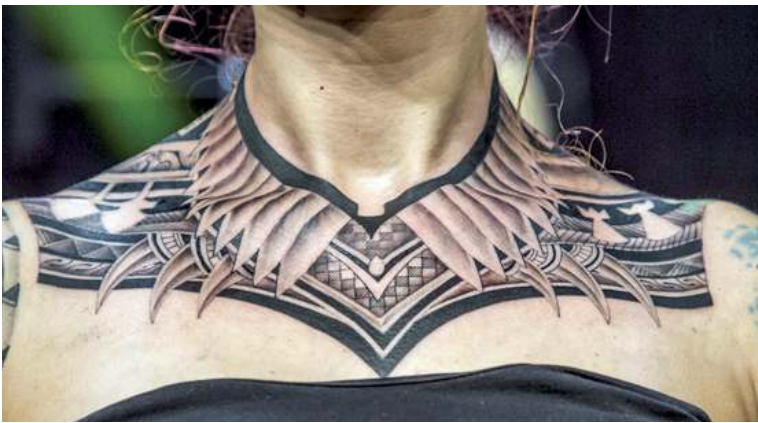


and Colin Dale, who were a very popular and welcome addition to the show.

I had been offered the honour of being on the judging panel and my duties begun with a meeting with show organiser Jean-Marc, and fellow judges Ludo from Le Main Bleue and Dodie, a celebrity tattooist from the Belgian version of 'Tattoo Fixers'. We were issued with tokens to hand out – during each day – to any tattoos we felt were worthy of inclusion in the Best of Day category (which was limited to only ten entries). It was certainly an interesting attempt to come up with a new approach to the competitions.







It's always good to refresh things, and this did sound like a good idea, but in reality it meant visiting every single booth to check each ongoing tattoo... and continuing to do so for the entire day! Not only did this create a lot of walking, it also led to the possibility of missing a great piece if the client happened to be taking a break. Or if the piece was small, it could get done and finished and leave before we even got to see it! Another downside was the animosity it caused if someone was determined to enter and yet was refused. This was all remedied on the Sunday however, by reverting to the system of allowing anyone who wanted to enter to come to the stage and show their work, with the judges awarding tokens to the pieces that they wanted to go through to the next round, and then choosing a winner from that selection.





Entertainment at the convention included an excellent rockabilly band, a burlesque style performance and a rapper – all very well received – complemented by the sound of hip-hop that filled the air throughout the weekend, under the auspices of some very popular and well-known DJs.

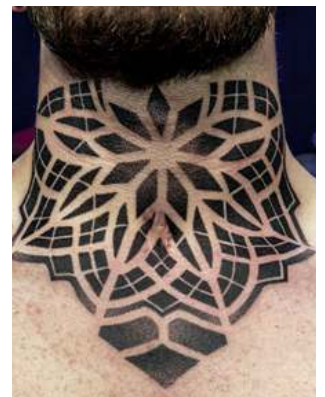
When the show opened on the Friday it was a slow and gentle start, but numbers rapidly picked up over the weekend with most estimates putting total attendance at upwards of 18,000! The only possible negative from the show was that many of the traders I spoke to complained of low sales; with so many of them selling similar products, this is possibly an area that the organisers may need to address? But with an entrance fee of just 15 Euros, and a great city-centre venue, this is without doubt an immensely attractive event for the visiting public.





I would certainly recommend taking the trip to the Lille. This is a very well organised and exciting tattoo convention (in a beautiful city) that, by all accounts, gets better and better each year – which these days is becoming a bit of a rarity. To drive to Lille from the UK is very simple, and the Eurostar will get you there from central London in a couple of hours if you prefer to go by train.

We'll let you know next year's dates as soon as they are released.





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‘MY WORK HAS AN AGGRESSIVE EDGE. NOTHING IS SMOOTH AND TIDY’



You may not know his name, but chances are you'll recognise his work. Graham Humphreys is a contemporary illustrator best known for his iconic horror movie posters, painted in gouache the traditional way. With a career spanning more than 40 years, we had plenty to talk about.

Born in 1960, Graham was educated as a graphic designer, specialising in illustration. A fan of horror films and punk rock, he moved to London and managed to land a contract with Palace Pictures to produce the poster for *The Evil Dead*. Such was the success of both the film and the poster, Graham soon found himself in demand. Since then he has worked on hundreds of film and music projects, including LP sleeves and private commissions. Korero Press recently published *Hung, Drawn and Executed: The Horror Art of Graham Humphreys*, a hardback retrospective of his work in all its gory glory.

‘MY TWO BIGGEST INSPIRATIONS? HAMMER HORROR AND THE EARLY PUNK SCENE’

Total Tattoo: Where did your love of horror come from?

Around 1970, I used to spend time at a friend's house and we'd delve into her father's book and record collection. The Screaming Lord Sutch record *Dracula's Daughter* and Bobby 'Boris' Pickett's *Monster Mash* were our favourites. There was also a book containing all the stories that inspired the original Universal monster films (I guess they must have been abridged versions) plus stills from the films. This was the first time I recall understanding what these horror film images signified. I was fascinated. I began to recognise the names and imagery elsewhere... Hammer Horror posters, the Aurora monster kits... then came the Dennis Gifford book, *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* (1973). I was hooked. The very first horror film I ever watched was *Frankenstein vs the Wolfman*. The Universal monster films played on late-night TV, but I wasn't allowed to watch the Hammer films until I was about 14. Of course it was all very tame stuff by today's standards!

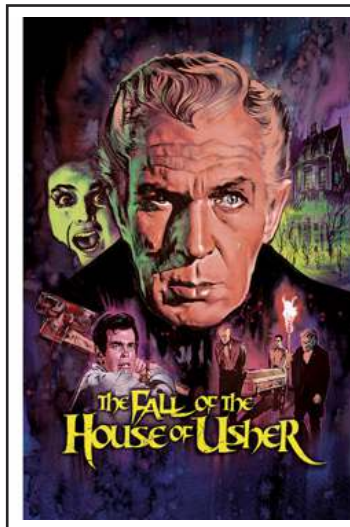
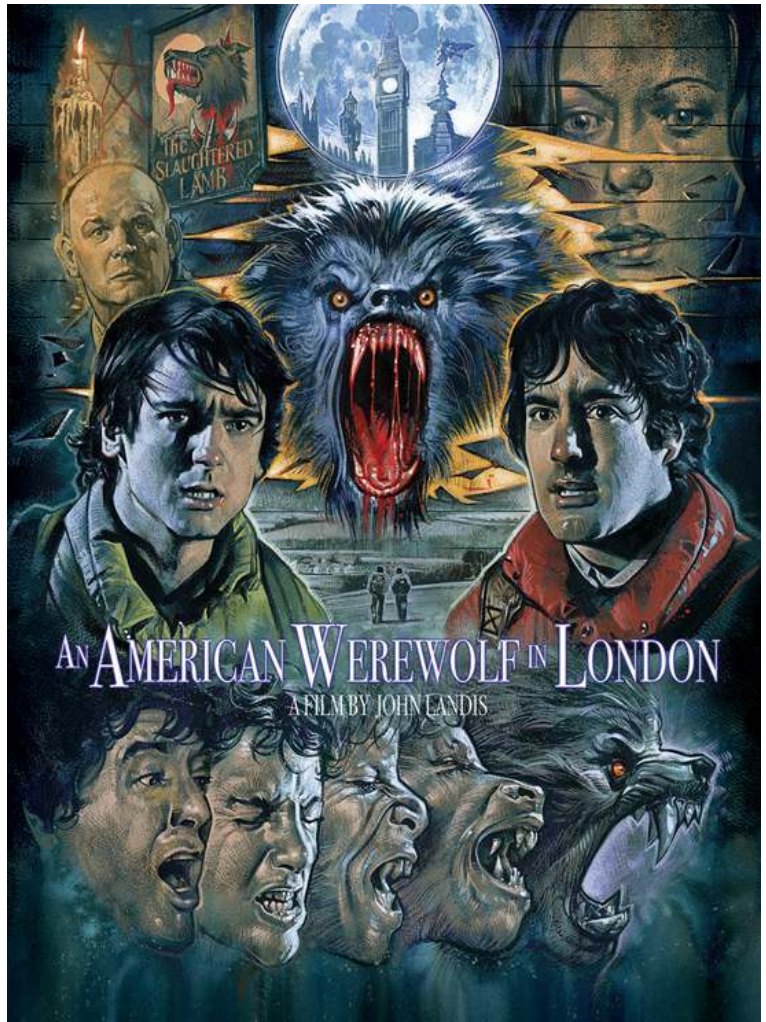
GRAHAM HUMPHREYS

Total Tattoo: Was that the golden age of film poster design?

Posters have evolved over the decades and reflect the times in which they were produced. Any 'golden age' would be a very subjective viewpoint and depend on how far back your own experience reaches. I was born in 1960, so my own awareness of film marketing is locked into the period following that decade. But I've always loved the poster art of earlier decades. I'm a big fan of those trashy B-movie posters from the 1940s and 1950s. These have been my true inspiration. Currently, the cinema of the 1980s appears to be enjoying a healthy renaissance among those too young to have lived it...

Total Tattoo: Has the horror film industry changed since you first began making posters?

The Evil Dead, my first real commission and the one that gave me the chance to flex my horror wings, was an independent release in the UK. At that point, the distributors themselves were as green as I was. It was a very free and exciting time. You got the impression we were all making it up as we went along. As I began to produce more posters, and moved into the world of VHS, many of my clients were still independent businesses so there was room for experimentation and very little corporate intervention. But inevitably, as the big money moved in, the really daring companies got swallowed up. It took a good couple of decades before 'transgressive' material was readily available again.

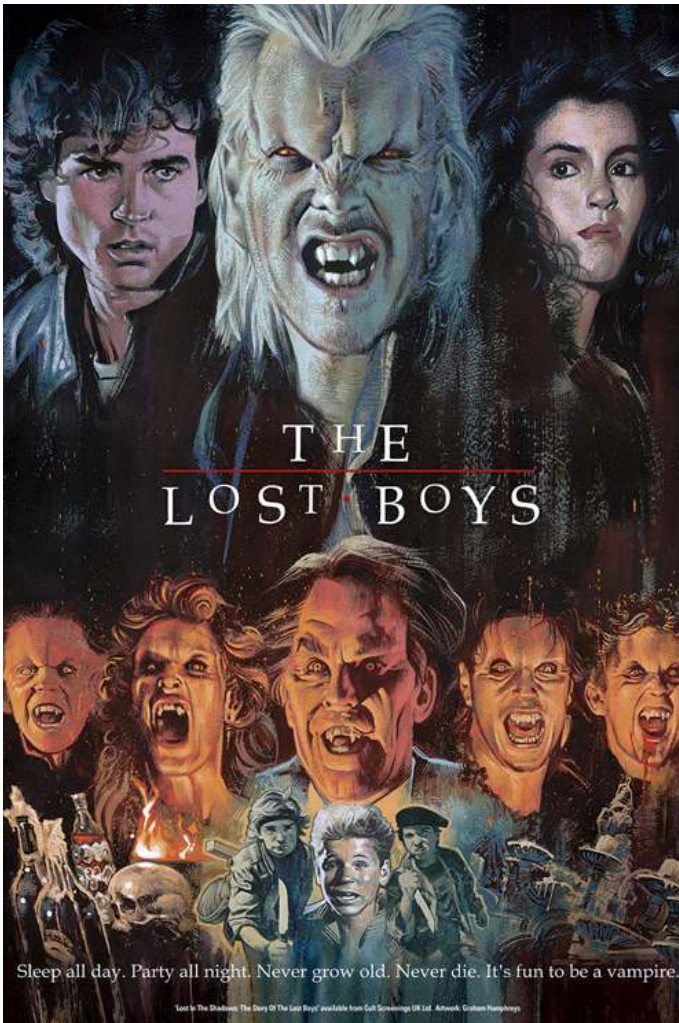


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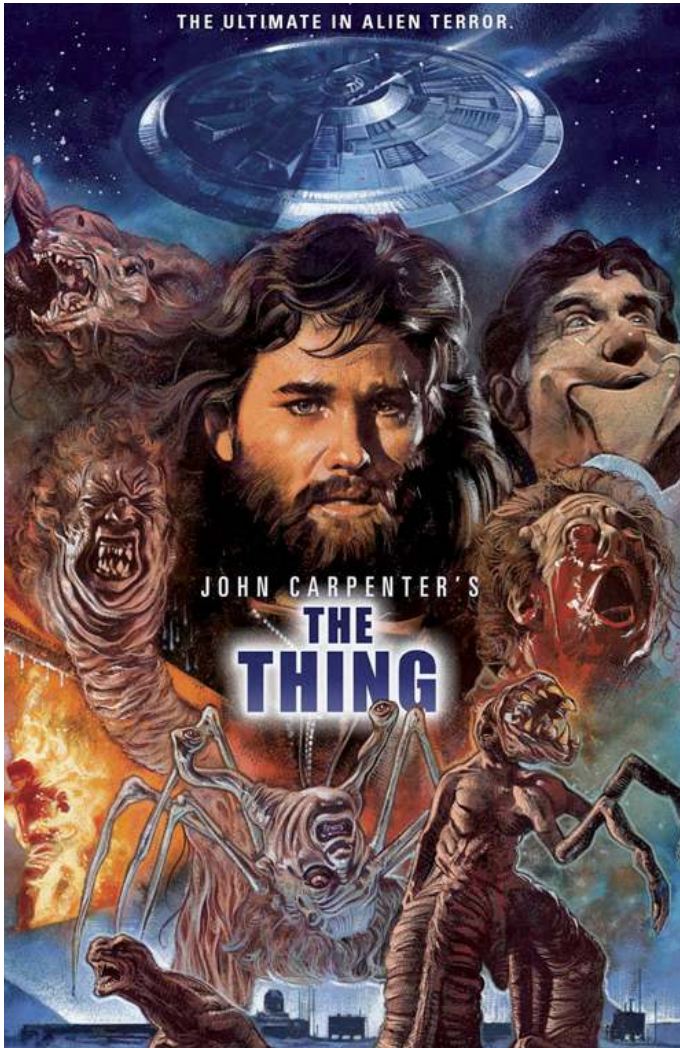
Total Tattoo: And has the nature of your work changed over the years too?

Although my actual illustration work is still paint-on-paper, the delivery-to-print end of things has been completely revolutionised by desktop computing. The messy paste-up, rub-down lettering, the baffling and expensive typesetting, darkroom 'photomechanical transfers', carefully inked linework and overlaid print instructions – it's all been consigned to the past. Looking back, the old ways seem almost Dickensian! And now that communication and artwork delivery is all digital, I generally have no need to meet my clients face-to-face. Not because I choose to avoid them of course, but it just saves so much time. And the internet is obviously fantastic for the exposure of my work. The only downside is that if I do a job I'm not happy with, it will still be out there. For ever. Which of course wouldn't have been the case in pre-internet days. Many a skeleton has burst out of the cupboard!



Total Tattoo: Which film posters are you particularly proud of?

I regard what I do as an ongoing learning process, so I usually feel embarrassed by my own past work. I prefer just to focus on my future art. And since everything I produce tends to be an approximation of what I actually had in mind, I find it hard to identify my most successful pieces. But I know certain posters have made an impact in the genre, and I'm happy to acknowledge those particular paintings. My two career-defining posters, the tent-poles if you like, both date from the 1980s – *The Evil Dead* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.



Total Tattoo: When you're designing a poster, does your reference come only from the film itself? Talk us through the process...

I'll watch the film at least three times. Once to understand the storyline and the overall texture of the film; a second time to identify the segments that best represent the film and provide the most interesting images; then a third time to gather the frozen moments as screen grabs (or photographs from the TV in the case of Blu-ray, because I don't have the necessary software!) Sometimes stills are supplied, and I also search for supplementary reference on the internet. If I can't find suitable material, I'll often photograph my colleagues or myself – especially my hands – to generate the poses I need. That way, I can get exactly the lighting I want too. I'll add any necessary props or additional elements such as locations, plus the actors' heads, in Photoshop. So the reference for a character on a poster might be collaged from three or four different sources. A lot of my work is focused on heads of course, because for a poster this is where the visual interest (whether it's facial expressions or specific actors) usually resides.



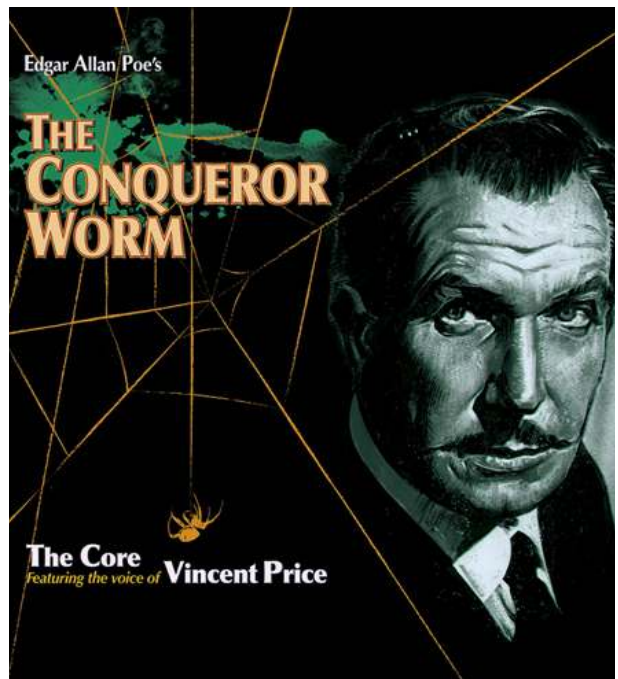


Total Tattoo: How do you then create the design?

Once I've made a decision on what's going to work most effectively, I print out the images and trace them in pencil. The sketched elements are then scanned into Photoshop where I can play with precise layouts and compositions. Reducing everything to pencil line is the best way I've found to eliminate the distractions of so much disparate source material. Whether the original was blurry or sharp, it all gets reduced to a uniform level of quality.

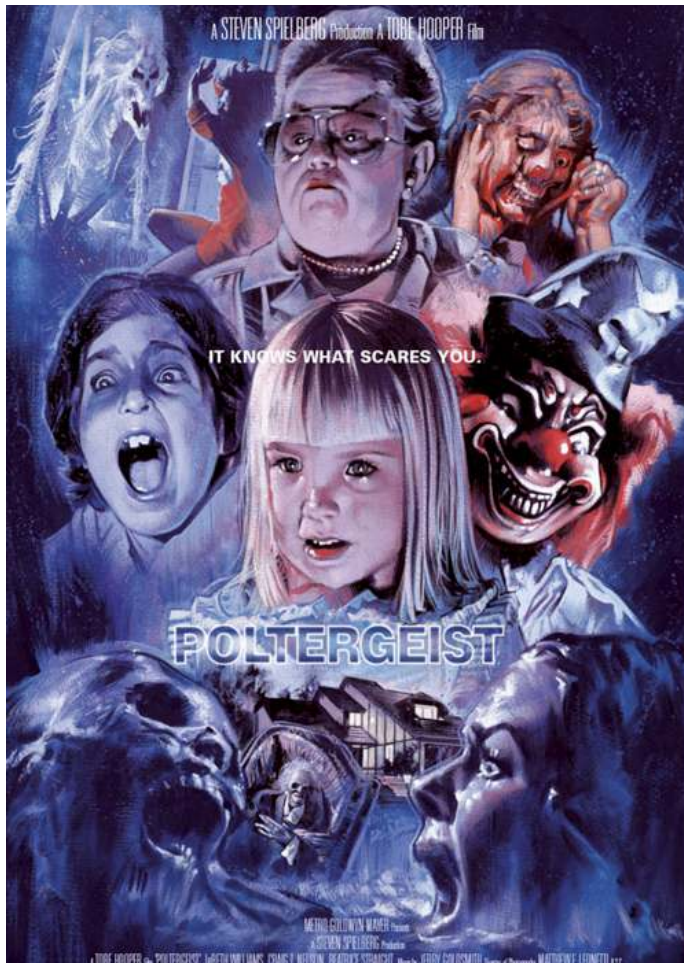
Total Tattoo: Do you usually make several versions of your designs?

I'll usually keep it to a maximum of three layout versions, simply because I trust my instincts without wasting time on infinite options. Then I'll email them to the client. Sometimes the client might want to see a combination of the options, but usually one will stand out that best suits their marketing purposes.



Total Tattoo: And then it's the final painting?

Once a layout is chosen, I reintroduce the original photographic source material over the sketch (in Photoshop) and print out the design at the exact size of the painting. This is then traced to provide the most accurate possible likenesses, etc. All my paintings begin with a wash of colour to provide a theme with which to work (I will already have considered the best colour approach). I paint the key portraiture first, and add the remaining elements in descending order of importance. This ensures that if time becomes an issue, the crucial parts are in place. The final art is then scanned and delivered to the client as a digital file. I retain all the original art.



Total Tattoo: How long does it take from start to finish?

Most jobs take between two and five days depending on the complexity and amount of portraiture.

Total Tattoo: Tell us about the paints you use...

I use Windsor & Newton Designer's Gouache in a basic set of eight pigments, selected because I know I can achieve a full colour range that will also translate to print (and digital) without loss. They have a high permanency, so the colours will last for decades and beyond; even my oldest work hasn't suffered any colour change over the years. I use a variety of brushes – they never last long with my techniques! My paper is Bockingford 190gsm watercolour paper ('Not' surface), which is thick enough not to buckle too much – taped down so it flattens after the initial wash has dried – yet thin enough to roll for storage. I have an old dinner plate that I use as a palette, a chipped pint glass that I use for the water, and a bit of broken mirror that I use to check my work from a fresh viewpoint.

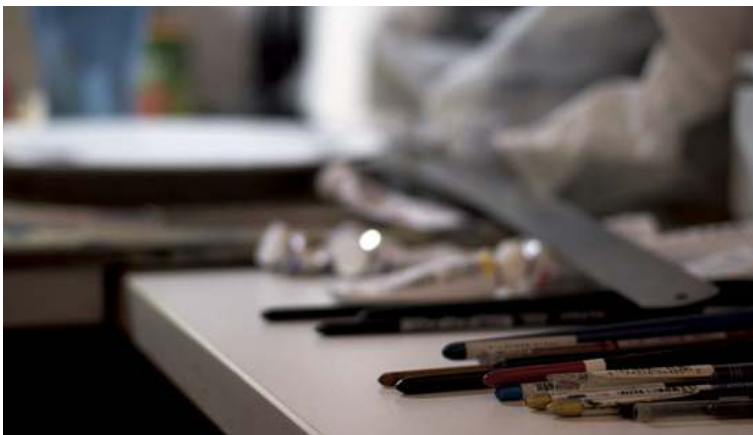


Total Tattoo: With digital technology so easily available, why stick to traditional methods of painting?

Indeed! Personally, I like the visceral process of paint-on-paper, the mixing of paint, the random marks and unpredictable accidents. And it requires no digital memory. I have artwork from four decades ago that still exists in the real world, and even now in this digital age every job I do results in a unique physical object, a secondary commodity. Of course, water or fire will destroy a painting so a digital back-up is therefore of value!

Total Tattoo: What defines your style?

My techniques, which have slowly evolved with experience, define my illustration style. I've always tried to avoid directly imitating other people's work, though I naturally take inspiration from everything I see. My work has an aggressive edge. As in real life, nothing is too smooth or tidy. My approach to colour has remained constant. There are palette themes I like to re-use because I know they work for the subject matter and relate to the influences I absorbed in my formative years. I always say the two things that most inspired my style were Hammer Horror and the early UK punk rock scene.



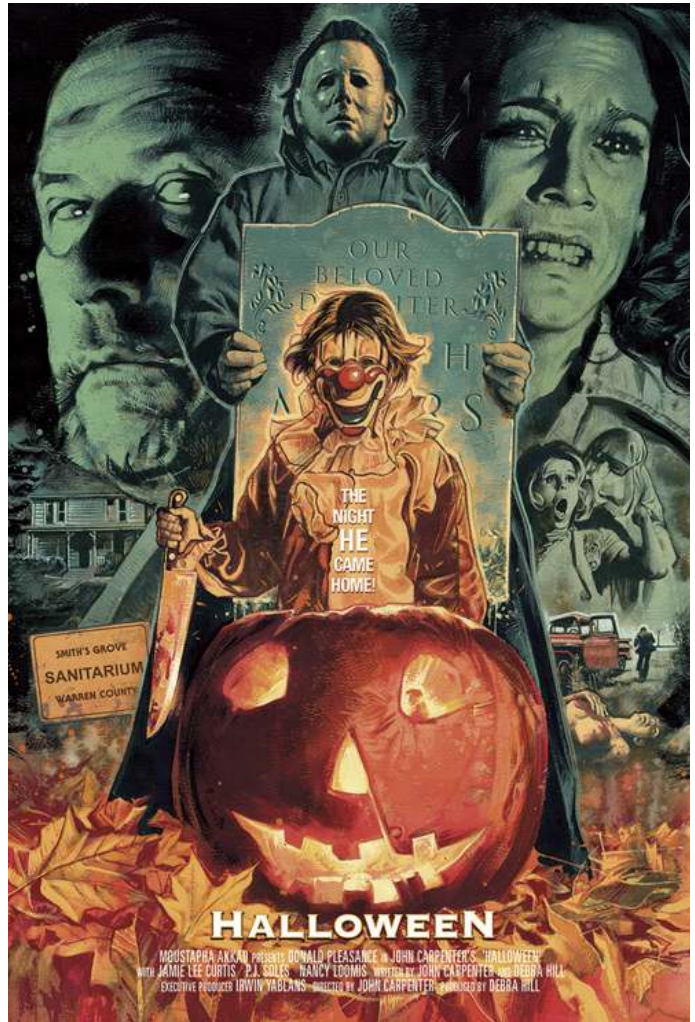
Total Tattoo: Have you ever considered tattooing as an alternative career, or seen any of your work tattooed on people?

Personally, I think I'd find the colour limitations of tattooing frustrating. And tattooing requires incredible skill to deliver a precise result (at least, that's my perception) whereas I work in a much more unpredictable fashion. My niece is a tattoo artist, and I have a huge respect for tattoo art – especially its three-dimensionality, which is in such complete contrast to what I do with my posters. Tattoos are almost a form of sculpture! But I've often seen my work reproduced as tattoos and I'm deeply humbled that anyone would choose to make it a permanent mark on their body.

www.grahamhumphreys.com

Hung, Drawn and Executed: The Horror Art of Graham Humphreys

(With a foreword by Dacre Stoker, great-grandnephew of Bram Stoker)
Korero Press 2019
ISBN 9781912740062
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T.J. FAIRFAX

**'GENRE LABELS MAKE ARTISTS EASIER TO FIND,
BUT NOBODY WANTS TO BE PUT IN A BOX'**



TJ Fairfax's tattoos, often featuring sensitive depictions of animals and birds or Japanese imagery with a neo-trad twist, are characterised by their exquisite linework. We were astonished to hear that he'd never really had any ambition to become a tattooist, and that it all happened purely by chance...

It's just five years since TJ finished his apprenticeship. Previously, he'd worked in a hospital, with the simple aim of earning enough money to get tattooed. "I'd always loved tattoos, from a very young age. But I don't really know why! None of my family had any, and it wasn't through the music that I was into, as it is with a lot of people. I didn't even see many tattoos on the streets because I grew up in a predominantly Muslim area. There were no tattoo shops near where I lived."

"I was getting work done at Thou Art in Sheffield," TJ continues, "so I got to know everyone there. When I found out they were looking for a new desk guy I applied for the job and got it. Becoming a tattooist was the last thing on my mind though. I'd been to art school, but I hated it. It actually put me off art." However, after three or four months immersed in the creative environment of Thou Art, TJ started to feel the need to draw again and the artist in him emerged once more. It seemed only natural that he should learn to tattoo.

"I'm so glad I worked at Thou Art", TJ tells me. "It's a big studio and we had some amazing guest artists coming through, with a real mix of styles – people like Cecil Porter, Jim Miner, Peter Lagergren, George Barderdin... It was such an inspiration. And Joe Frost joined just the week before me!"





Like most, TJ did every style when he first started and gained a good solid foundation. But deep down he had a preference for neo-trad. "A lot of the people that I liked and followed were doing these beautiful illustrative pieces. It wasn't even called 'Neo-Traditional' back then. Whatever it was, I just knew I loved it. I remember looking at Eckel's book that came out at that time. He was so far ahead of everyone else. Everyone was inspired by his work."

"One of the things I love about neo-trad," TJ continues, "is the diversity within the genre. It can be almost-traditional right through to almost-realism and everything in between. But that's the weird thing about putting a label on anything. It's the same with music. Categorising everyone into genres makes artists easier to find, but it's also rubbish because nobody wants to be confined in a small box."

After leaving Thou Art, TJ worked for while in Barnsley before coming back to Sheffield to tattoo at Follow Your Dreams with Tacho Franch and Dave Barry. "A lot of people thought I would go and work with Joe Frost, who'd set up his private studio around that same time. But I'd only been tattooing for a couple of years and I knew I needed more experience. Follow Your Dreams was ideal because it was more of a street shop. Of course eventually, after another couple of years, I went and joined Joe. It's been excellent. We get on really well. Our styles are similar, so we're always discussing colours, asking each other for a second opinion, and generally helping each other."



TJ is super critical of his own work. "Maybe it's because I had quite a fast apprenticeship. I was kind of thrown in at the deep end – which isn't necessarily a bad thing of course – but I've never felt truly confident and it's taken me a while to become comfortable with certain aspects of my tattooing. For instance I know that my linework is fine, in fact I get complimented on it by some great tattooists, but I'm still extremely self-critical. I do feel my colour theory has definitely come on over the last few months (I use Solid Ink and Starbrite and the occasional one-off colour from some other manufacturers) and I'm really happy with that aspect of my work now."

I ask TJ if there are there any recent tattoos that have really pushed him artistically or technically. "I did a large otter skull with a bunch of berries around it, on the top of an arm, that I was really pleased with. I also did a really nice snail and rose in Scotland. I really like the colour palette that I used on that piece. I tried to strip it right back. In fact that's carried on and led to a simplification in my work. Lately I've also been doing a sort of neo-traditional Japanese style. It still kind of respects and follows the rules, but it's a bit different for around Sheffield and it's helping to make my work stand out a bit."



"I just want to improve with every single tattoo I do," TJ continues. "Usually whenever I finish a piece I think I could have done it better... and then I see it a year later and think, 'Oh that looks good!' and I don't know why I ever thought it was bad. But over time everything changes, and what I'm happy with now maybe I won't be in the future? In England we're brought up not to show off, and I don't ever want to appear cocky. There's a fine line between confident and cocky and once you go over that line people think you're a dickhead! But I do sometimes think perhaps we beat ourselves up and put ourselves down just to save anyone else from doing it..."



"I really haven't ever developed much of an ego. That's both a good thing and a bad thing. Fortunately I don't have to fight for customers with loads of other artists. Whenever I go to London it's such a busy, fast pace. You have to compete for everything. Here in the north it seems a lot more chilled out and laid back, even in a city like Leeds that has such a concentration of great artists. Working in a private studio, I guess I'm a little removed from the scene as a whole. Tattooing can be a very unhealthy environment if you're not careful, and if you let yourself get drawn into it. It takes over your life, and you need to keep your feet on the ground. It's important to have good people around you."





Before tattooing, music was TJ's first love and it's still a major passion. He's been playing drums in his band for eight years now. "It's really good to have something else outside of tattooing," he tells me, "a creative outlet with a different group of mates. Sometimes if I'm struggling with a design or a tattoo concept and I go practice with the band it can really help move things forward, because you switch off from the problem completely."

TJ also draws and paints for fun. "I can't help myself! Sometimes it's just silly little characters, nothing to do with tattoos. I've always done that. If I finish tattooing early, I might just sit and draw some stupid cock sketches for the sheer hell of it. I strongly believe all tattooists should have the ability to draw, even if it's just a decent cock!"

I wondered how TJ felt about the rapid encroachment of technology in tattooing. "Technology definitely makes our job easier," he says, "and iPads are not a bad thing in themselves, although I do think people use them as a bit of a crutch if their drawing skills aren't that great. And at conventions, having hundreds of designs on your iPad almost gives customers too much choice. I like to take just a couple of dozen designs with me, and that's it. I usually take things that I want to be doing - which aren't necessarily always the things that are going to sell well. But you can't go too wild, or you wouldn't get enough work. You need to have a mix. I love doing skulls and everyone loves a good skull!"





To finish our interview, I ask TJ how he sees the industry and its future. "I don't know really," he says. "At times I hear myself moaning that the new kids on the block aren't doing things right... but I also hear apprentices complaining that they had to leave after six months because they weren't learning anything and were just expected to clean the floors. I have to admit though, I find myself agreeing with the older generation when they say some of these kids are getting it too easy. They expect the world on a plate. Being an apprentice is about putting up with a load of shit to prove to your mentor - and more importantly to prove to yourself - that you really want it. Because tattooing isn't an easy industry. It's never going to be easy. That's what you learn over time."





"Whether it's tattooing or music or the arts in general, I don't think the creative industries in the UK are valued highly enough," TJ continues. "It's so different in other countries – in America, or elsewhere in Europe. Take the band for instance. There's five of us, and if we're offered a gig the organiser will only want to pay us a pittance, even though we've got to travel there with all our gear and maybe take an afternoon off work as well. But it is what it is, and I'm happy to keep playing my music – just as I'm happy to keep tattooing and doing my thing. If people want it, great. If not, it's not so bad."

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LUKE ASHLEY, SOUTH CITY MARKET



KALU ONER

JOHN ENGFORS (SWEDEN)



JAMIE LEE KNOTT, DARK HORSE COLLECTIVE



RYAN DOBBS, DOBBYR TATTOO

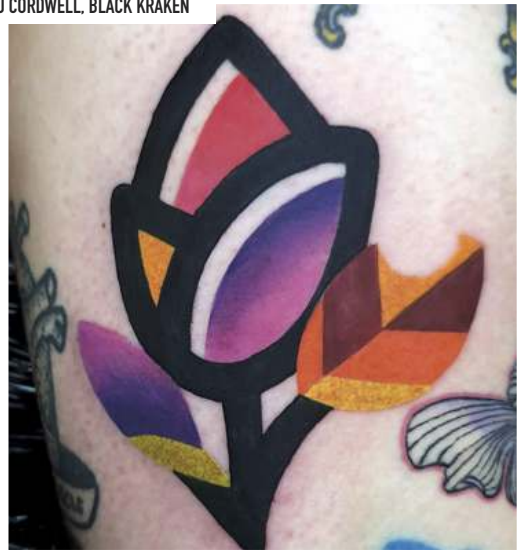


LETI MORTIMER, THE BLUE TATTOO

HATTIE COX, DARK HORSE COLLECTIVE



J CORDWELL, BLACK KRAKEN



JAVIER OBREGON, FAMILY ART (SPAIN)



CHRIS PAPADAKIS, MOTH AND ROSE (GREECE)



JAMIE LEE KNOTT, DARK HORSE COLLECTIVE



OLLIE TYE, COSMIC MONSTERS INCORPORATED



MANU SANTANA, SEVEN DOORS TATTOO



DALE TABBITT, SEVEN SINS



ANTHONY LENNOX, PARADISE TATTOO



DENO, SEVEN DOORS TATTOO



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SARAH TERRY, RED TATTOO



ALLY SCARLETT, BLACK LANTERN



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LIZ VENOM, BOMBSHELL TATTOO GALERIE (CANADA)



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A Total Tattoo special feature with contributions from Mike Kruse (Shagbuilt), David Bryant, Lal Hardy (New Wave Tattoo) and Jon Longstaff (Black Dog Tattoos)

LOYAL TO THE COIL

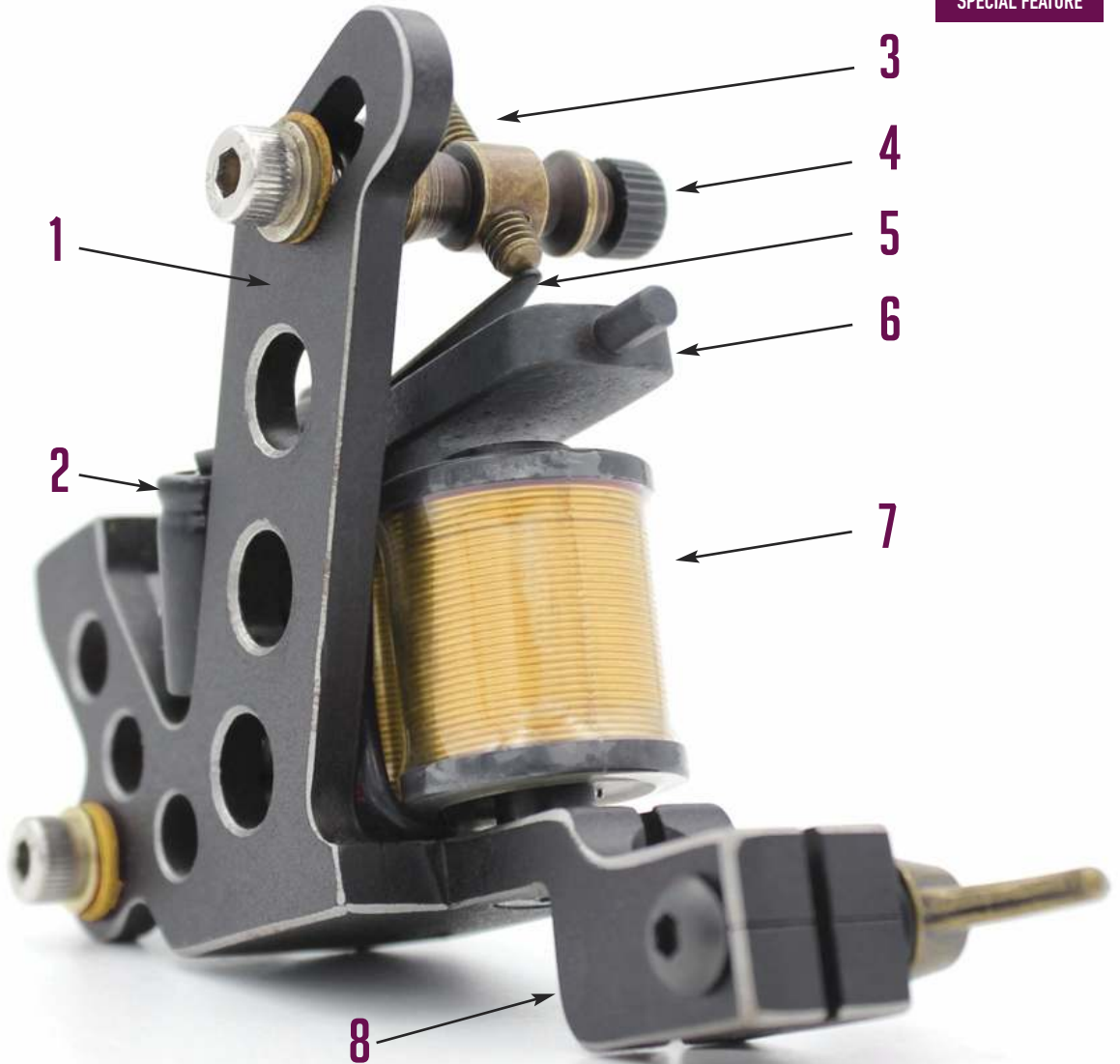
PART 2: A MODERN TRADITION

Whether you swear by them or swear *at* them, there's no denying the good old-fashioned coil machine is enjoying something of a renaissance right now. Like vinyl records and classic cars, they have unique qualities that transcend mere convenience. A well-made coil machine has a soul.

Last month, in Part One, we looked at the pioneering inventions that kick-started electric tattooing a century and a half ago. This month, in the company of machine builders Dave Bryant and Mike Kruse, and tattooists Lal Hardy and Jon Longstaff, we're going to chat about hand-building and tuning.

What's tuning all about?

First a quick paragraph on how these machines work, for non-tattooists or those who missed Part One. A coil machine operates on exactly the same principle as an old-fashioned electric doorbell. Essentially, electromagnetic coils drive a sprung armature bar to which the needles are attached. In its 'up' position, this armature bar completes an electrical circuit (via the contact screw), activating the magnetic field – which then pulls the armature bar down, immediately breaking the circuit, deactivating the magnetic field, and allowing the armature bar to spring back up again. And so the whole cycle repeats itself, creating the coil machine's characteristic rapid-fire hammer action and buzz.



**'A WELL-MADE MACHINE
WILL EARN THE OWNER
ITS PRICE BACK MANY
TIMES OVER'**

- LAL HARDY

1. FRAME
2. CAPACITOR
3. CONTACT SCREW
4. TOP BINDING POST
5. FRONT SPRING
6. ARMATURE BAR
7. COILS
8. TUBE CLAMP

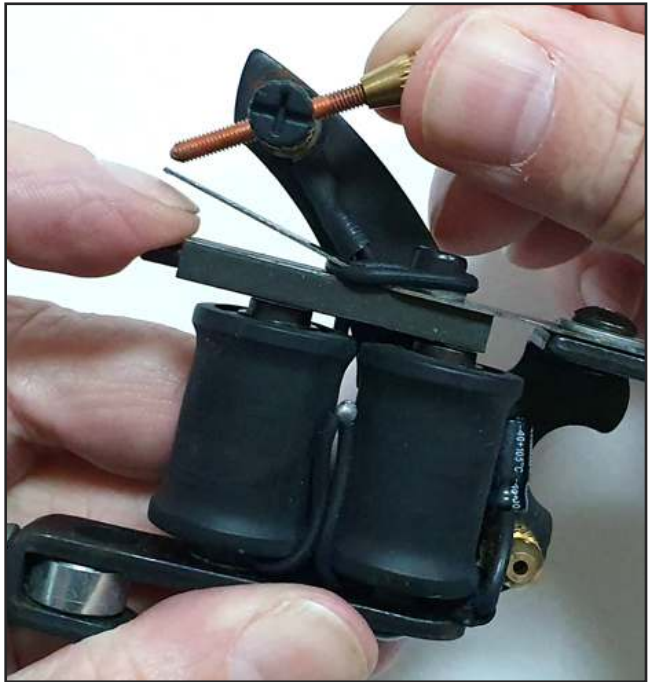
The beauty of coil machines is that despite this apparent simplicity, they are infinitely adjustable and customisable, from initial build through to final set-up.

The most basic of these adjustments is setting the contact gap – the gap between the front spring and the contact screw – to make the machine cycle faster or slower. Traditionalists will be familiar with the old-school 'nickel and dime' trick: A contact gap the thickness of a nickel (approx 2mm) sets the machine up as a shader; a gap the thickness of a dime (approx 1.4mm) sets it up as a liner. But as any tattooist knows, there's so much more to it than that. Every single aspect of the machine's configuration – from the accurate alignment of the contact screw and the tensioning of the springs to the weight of the armature bar and the layering of the coils – has a part to play in how it runs.

Tuning a machine is all about finding the sweet spot and achieving that perfect balance between the different variables so that the machine will run as smoothly as possible, do exactly what you want it to do, and feel good in your hand. Mike Kruse describes it beautifully: "It's like you're unlocking the machine's soul when that happens."

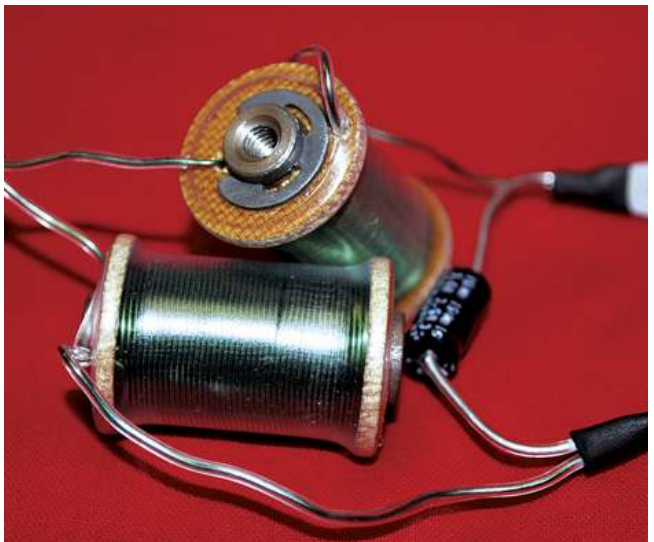
Fundamentally it's the dimensions of the machine, its overall shape and the positioning of its various components relative to one another (the frame geometry in other words) that will govern its performance. As Mike explains, "Geometry is of the utmost importance. It's the foundation of a good machine. All the other pieces of the puzzle can be altered and adjusted to bring the machine into tune, but if the geometry is incorrect, it's going to be difficult to get it running absolutely right."

As with any specialist field of knowledge, the deeper you go into machine theory the more there is to discover. "You can dip your toe in the water," says Dave Bryant, "or you can immerse yourself in it fully – which isn't always feasible of course. For most tattooers machine theory as a whole remains something of a mystery. There's a lot of the iceberg below the surface."



How important is it for tattooists to know how to tune their own machines?

Lal Hardy has an immediate, unequivocal answer. "It's vitally important. Any tattooist who doesn't know how to tune a machine, or change a spring etc, really should learn!" And Jon Longstaff echoes that view. "Yes, it's very important to have the basic knowledge – unless you're planning on throwing your machines away or sending them back to the maker the minute they need tuning up."



Dave adds, “Having the confidence to adjust a contact on the fly, or knowing why you’re having trouble sinking a line, is going to reduce your stress levels immensely. You’re flying blind if you don’t know whether it’s the needle, the client’s skin, the power unit or the machine itself that’s to blame for the problem. Also, it’s peace of mind if you can recognise that something is a ten-minute fix rather than needing to be sent off for repair. But some tattooists don’t want to bother with that kind of thing, and other folks just aren’t technically-minded. Plus some builders void the warranty if you mess too much with their machines. So it’s really an individual call.”



Mike sums it up by saying, “It’s definitely important to know how to keep a machine in tune, but I don’t think it’s necessary for a tattooer to know how to tune a machine from scratch in the way a machine-builder would. That’s a skillset that has to be developed over many years of practice. Once broken in, a coil machine – if treated properly – should run well for many years, but machines can easily fall out of tune if mishandled and many tattooers don’t have the skills or knowledge to return them to their original glorious state. It’s obviously vital to know how to maintain your machine, including simple things like keeping the contact point clean and the springs free of rust.”

So do Mike and Dave feel that the art of fine-tuning a coil machine is lost to the younger generation of tattooists? “Yes,” says Dave, “I think for the most part it is. But they’re not solely to blame. There’s a lot of half-assed teaching out there, and a lack of interest that can manifest itself on both sides of the apprentice relationship. Too many tattooers like to flaunt their knowledge without sharing it, which can be discouraging to anyone who wants to explore. But of course for newcomers there’s often that desire for

instant gratification.” And he adds sardonically, “Why take years to learn properly, when you can start earning money after just a few months?” Mike contributes his own heartfelt comment. “There are certainly a lot of younger tattooists who are really missing out on the pleasures of using these wonderful tools.”

How do you go about choosing a machine to buy?

“That’s a tough question,” says Dave. “Aesthetics do play a part, but shouldn’t take priority over considerations of performance. Looks contribute nothing... except pride in your tools and the pleasure of owning them of course.” Mike agrees. “Yes, I’ve always believed in the philosophy of function over form, but obviously if you can have both, that’s an added bonus!”

“It’s definitely an individual thing,” continues Dave. “The reality is you might have to try a fair few machines before you find what fits your own hand. That’s why it’s so important to know how to make a machine work for you. Talk to artists you trust who work in a similar style.”





“If I was in the market for a hand-built machine,” says Mike, “I would take the time to do some thorough research. Of course individual coil machines, even those from the same builder, all have their own personalities – every machine will have a different ‘feel’ – but if possible, I’d borrow and use the type of machine I was interested in purchasing.”

“You need to be prepared to invest in more than just a couple of machines,” Mike continues. “Coil machines work better if designed to be task-specific, so machines that run really well for smaller needle groupings are probably not going to be the most efficient for larger ones and vice versa. You’re going to want to have the right tool for the job at hand when you need it.”

Lal puts it in perspective: “The longevity of a well-made machine will earn the owner its price back many times over.” Which brings us on to the thorny topic of the poor quality mass-produced machines currently flooding the market.

'TUNING A MACHINE PROPERLY IS LIKE UNLOCKING ITS SOUL'

- MIKE KRUSE



What's so bad about cheap machines?

“Well, aside from being an indication of the extent to which our craft is being infiltrated and influenced by outsiders,” Mike says, “these cheap machines are hurting our art. Firstly, it’s more than likely they’re not being built or tuned by an experienced hand, therefore they’re not going to run efficiently. Not only that, but they give easy access to the increasing numbers of people who are treating tattooing as a hobby – in other words, the people who are tattooing who really have no business doing so. All of this translates into bad tattoos. A true-hearted tattooer should have no problem investing in good tools to make their tattooing the best it can be. I really can’t see an upside to cheap machines. They cheapen the whole tattoo experience and damage its integrity.”

Dave has an equally strong view on the subject. “Yeah, cheap machines are usually built like shit, out of poor quality metal, with no sound theory behind them. You have no recourse for repairs or defects, and you’re supporting a faceless entity with no connection to our trade or its lineage. But no one has to buy them. No one has to get work by those wielding them. It’s all about personal responsibility. That said, there’s folk carving people up with quality machines costing hundreds of pounds and others doing amazing work with cheap clunkers...”



So what makes a great machine?

“It’s trial and error, and the quality of your materials and components,” says Dave, “and doing all you can to make sure each machine you make benefits from everything you’ve learned up to that point.”

“The subtleties could keep you tinkering for ever,” he continues. “Machine theory is about refining that basic doorbell circuit, fused with decades of collective and individual discoveries and experiences, based on a multitude of personal theories, styles and techniques... and everyone’s opinion is different. Two people could immerse themselves in the subject for a decade and still have wildly varying methods and views. There are builders who will tune a machine too fast or too slow for my liking, but I can’t say they’re doing it wrong if the machine produces a flawless tattoo.”

What’s the thing about hand-wound coils?

“To me, it’s all part of hand-building a machine,” Mike says. “Hand-winding is actually fairly difficult to do well, and I think most builders take a lot of pride in it. The coils are the heart of the machine, so it’s important to get it right.”

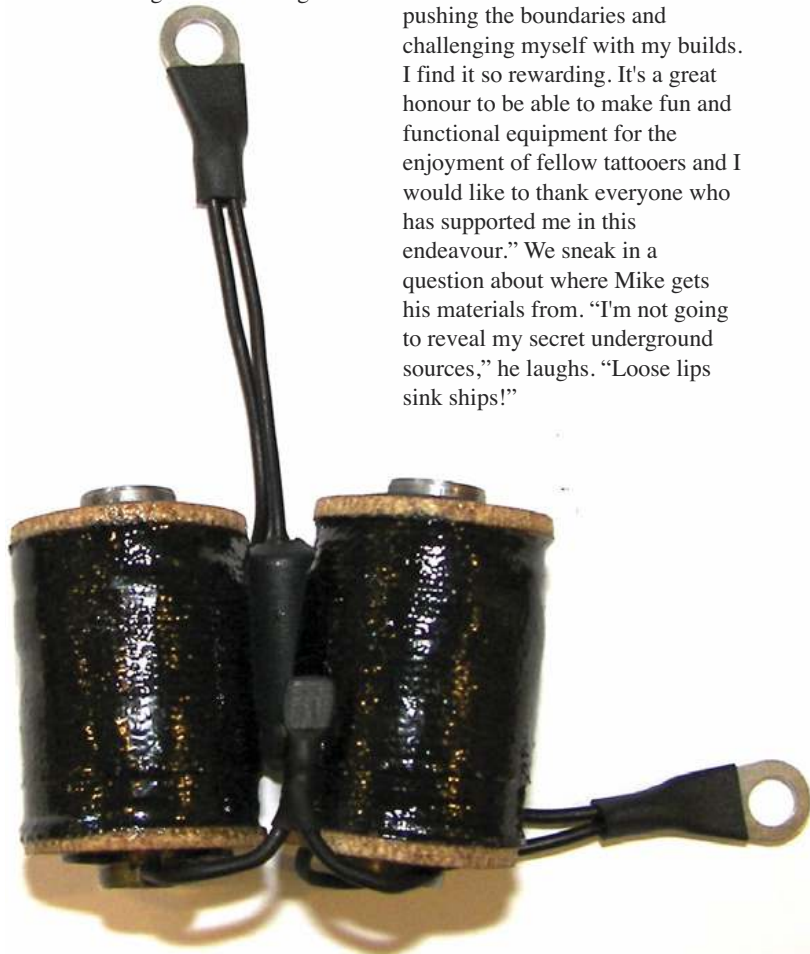
“Yeah, it’s a level of skill that demonstrates your ability and craftsmanship,” adds Dave, “like a restaurant making their own bread. But at the end of the day, if you know what you’re doing there’s not going to be much difference between electrically-wound or hand-cranked coils. The end result should be the same. For me, it’s a numbers thing. Am I building one

machine this week, or 50? I’ve had a converted film reel rewriter for years that’ll do a set of coils in a few minutes.”

What first drew Mike and Dave into machine building?

“I originally got into it so that I could develop a better understanding of my craft,” explains Mike. “I’ve been tattooing since 1996 and building machines since 1999. Back then there weren’t many people making machines – at least not many that I knew of – and I wanted to be able to improve the technical side of my tattooing.”

“Even after all these years,” Mike continues, “I’m still excited about pushing the boundaries and challenging myself with my builds. I find it so rewarding. It’s a great honour to be able to make fun and functional equipment for the enjoyment of fellow tattooers and I would like to thank everyone who has supported me in this endeavour.” We sneak in a question about where Mike gets his materials from. “I’m not going to reveal my secret underground sources,” he laughs. “Loose lips sink ships!”



Dave tells us, “I’ve been a tattooist for 20 plus years. I got into machine building around 2002, when I found out you could do it in a garage! Previously, I’d figured you needed specialist industrial equipment. As I started getting to know other builders, I found this other side to the craft that just pulled me in. But to begin with, it was simply about the personal accomplishment of building a machine. Nothing more than that.”

“I began by sand-casting some frames from wooden patterns,” he recalls, “then spent weeks hand-filing them. And it just went from there. You learn more, and suddenly you’re fixing other people’s machines, then you sell one that you’ve made, then you get interest from others wanting them, and it just grows. All I can say is I’m blown away that so many people have contributed to my life in this way, and are continuing to

support me in what I do. Machine-building will always remain a small batch thing for me, because I want to keep that sense of contributing to the craft. Large-scale production just feels loveless to me. It strips it of all its enjoyment.”

Should a machine builder also be a tattooist?

Mike has strong feelings about this. “I tend to be of the school of thought that if you aren’t a tattooer, then you shouldn’t be doing *anything* in this industry (with obvious exceptions like hygiene supplies of course). We’re slowly losing our craft to corporations who only see tattooing as a cash cow, and that’s hurting this thing we love so much.”

“I’m not gonna make a hardline statement on this,” says Dave, “but being a tattooer definitely gives you a feeling for tuning and geometry that you wouldn’t have if you’d never

'THE SUBTLETIES OF MACHINE THEORY COULD KEEP YOU TINKERING FOREVER'

- DAVE BRYANT

broken skin. Then again, I build machines to hit a certain way but there’s no guarantee another tattooer would gel with that machine’s function in the same way as me. There are no absolutes.”



Great names and personal favourites

There have been many legendary machine builders over the years – Cap Coleman, Norman 'Sailor Jerry' Collins, Owen Jensen, Paul Rogers, Percy Waters and Milton Zeis to name but a few – and there are some great names out there now. Every tattooist has their own personal favourite machines that they love to work with on a day-to-day basis, and most artists will have fond memories of the machines they used early on in their careers.

Early machine courtesy of Lal Hardy



Early machine courtesy of Lal Hardy



Lal, for example, told us that he regularly uses coil machines by Dan Self Made (for power lines), On A Mission (liner), Hatchback Irons (liner), Rob Hostetter (colour packer) and Bovver Boy (soft shader), and the first one he ever bought was a one-piece spring machine by Ultra. Jon told us his first coil machines were a Micky Sharpz Micro Dial liner and a Micky Sharpz Telephone Dial shader, both 1998 castings. "I rotate the usage of my machines now," he said, "but my most-used liner is a Sergio Garate brass Dietzel circa 2014. It's versatile and will push a range of needle groupings at medium speed. If I use a coil shader it's most often one of my own construction, made of components from various sources. Some of the machines I use, I've stripped down and rebuilt so they're not the same as they were when I first bought them." (Both Lal and Jon also told us they're not averse to using rotaries as and when required.)



Early Paul Rogers machine courtesy of Lal Hardy

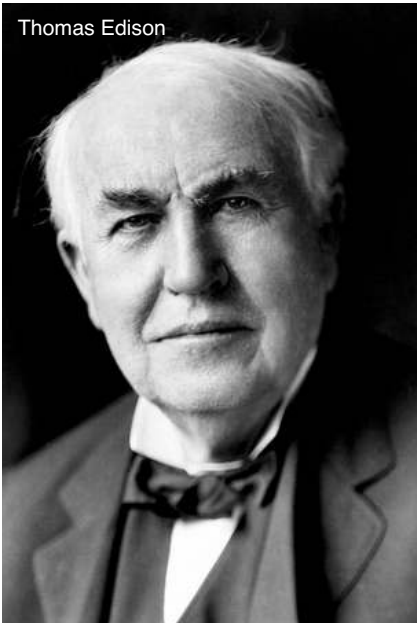
Dave told us he'd like to give a shout-out to those machine builders who, over the years, have helped or inspired him on a personal level. "Let's see... It was Trevor Shea who first lit the fire for me, then Scott Veldhoen and

Soba. Dino Sarin had a website called The Tattoo Machine Depot that was mind-blowing. There was the early stuff by people such as Aaron Cain, Adam and Seth Ciferri, and Bernhard Borg, then you had guys like Jim Rosal and Jon Moniz. But that's just a few. There are many more names in my head than space to print them! The aesthetic back then was unmistakably hand-built. Nothing flashy. It was honest, real, a little bit secret and alchemical. Love-over-cash was the prevailing motivation.”

Mike wraps it up, saying that whilst name-checking the best contemporary builders is a highly subjective matter, “It's definitely important to acknowledge those who came before us and on whose shoulders we stand today.”

Which brings us back to Thomas Edison, whose perforating 'stencil-pen' was the inspiration behind the earliest electric tattoo machines. Little did he realise where his invention would lead! Or *did* he? Apparently Edison himself had a mystery tattoo on his forearm (a quincunx pattern of five dots) so it's intriguing to think there could be another chapter of the story still waiting to be discovered...

Thomas Edison



Edison's original stencil-pen for duplicating documents (patented 1876)



**GOOD LUCK
IRON**

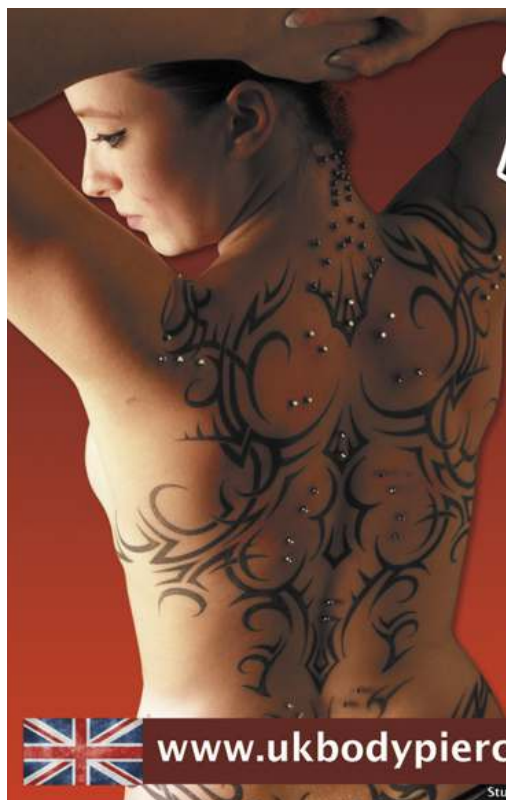
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ACHILLEAS



ABER



Achilleas Aber is the tattooist-owner of Knife Party Tattoo in Athens.

He produces strong, beautiful neo-trad work with a distinctive colour palette... and a surprising connection to ancient Greek sculpture.

Tell us about your journey into tattooing.

It's pretty much the story of my whole life! But here it is in a nutshell: I started doing graffiti around the age of 11. That's really when my artistic side first appeared, and I got seriously into drawing too. Then when I was about 17 or 18 people started telling me I should think about getting into tattooing. While I was in the army on military service, that's what I decided to do. As soon as I left the army I began tattooing friends and a couple of months later I was embarking on an apprenticeship in a tattoo studio. I've been tattooing for six years now, and I've worked in three different studios. Just over a year ago I opened my own place, Knife Party Tattoo.

Have you always been based in Greece?

Yes, I grew up in Athens and I'm planning on being based here for ever. Obviously I enjoy visiting other countries, but for me, nothing compares to Greece.

Has Greek art influenced your style of tattooing?

To be honest, Greek art wasn't much of an influence in my early days as a tattooist. But over the years, it's become a huge inspiration. The neo-trad shapes and forms that you see in my designs closely resemble those found in ancient Greek sculpture.

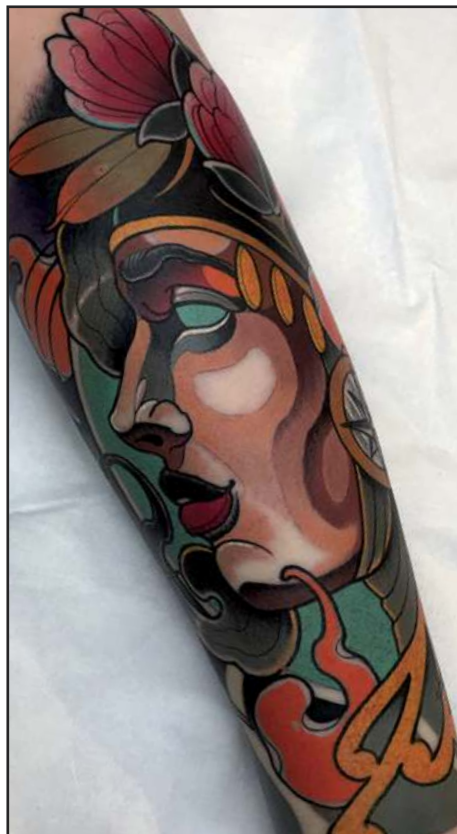
What is it about neo-trad that appeals to you?

I'm a huge fan of every traditional tattoo style, but neo-trad is the 'ultimate' - at least that's how I see it - because it encompasses every other tattoo genre and virtually every tattoo technique! I'd only been tattooing for a few months when I discovered The New Traditionalists (Europe) facebook page and it was love at first sight. Then when my own work got posted on their instagram a few years later it was truly a goosebumps moment that I'll never forget.



Do you think neo-trad is continuing to grow in popularity?

Yes, definitely. I first started doing tattoos in this style towards the end of 2013. At that time, there weren't many up-and-coming neo-trad artists - only the big names who'd been around for a while. Now there are hundreds or maybe thousands of neo-traditionalists and the competition is huge.



Are there any personal flourishes or unique details that you like to put into your work?

Yes, but they change from time to time. I think most artists do this. We put in those little details and finishing touches that will make our work 'our own'. Then we get bored with what we're doing and try to find different stuff to excite us all over again.





What tattoos have you done recently that you are most proud of?

I enjoy a feeling of pride around all my tattoos. Whenever I get to tattoo somebody, it just makes me feel happy, even when I'm in a bad mood. But if I had to choose one particular recent tattoo, I'd say the huge full outer arm chrysanthemum I did at last year's Paris convention. That was something I really enjoyed doing, and it also brought me a lot of new people interested in my work.



What do you think makes your work stand out?

I don't really see it that way. There are so many artists out there who really kick ass. But if I stop and think about what I'm really trying to do, and what gives my work its particular 'look'... well I reckon it's the solid colours and forms, and all the different layers. At least, that's what people tell me.





Tell us about your colour choice.

It took me quite some time to settle on a palette that would be distinctive and recognisable. I've tried lots of different colours and lots of different inks over the years. I still like trying out different things to bring something new into my tattoos, but now that my style is so well established any changes are much less noticeable.

Do you ever struggle to develop original designs?

Oh yes, of course! I'm sure every artist does. When I come up against a block, I just leave it. I watch a movie, or listen to some music, and then try again later. That usually works for me.

Tell us about Knife Party Tattoo.

Knife Party is one of the things I'm most proud of. It was a very sudden decision to open my own shop, but I've worked hard for it and it's a good feeling to have taken this big step at the age of just 25. It's a cosy, welcoming private studio, with a comfortable homey atmosphere, near the centre of Athens. We have six artists: me, Black Stab, Painter, Pls-Kys, Efthimis and Lin. Each of us has our own style, and we work only by appointment. We're a really good team. The others are all great artists and nice guys too – just what I was hoping for when I set up the studio.





What are the challenges of being a studio owner as well as a tattooist?

None really! I'm able work in a way that suits me, and I know it suits the other guys too. I don't care about what the rest of the industry is doing. And I don't mind if things are busy or slow; it's all the same to me. Of course we all need to earn a living from what we do, but when money becomes your first priority – above your art – and you don't give a damn about your colleagues, that's when the problems arise. And that's when the meaning goes out of tattooing.

What's the tattoo scene like in Greece?

Greece is a small country, but strangely it has a big tattoo scene – and it's a very high quality scene too, with top class artists in all genres.





What do you get from working conventions?

I really love doing conventions. I like meeting new artists and new people. In the past, I've also enjoyed being in the competitions - it's something that's been immensely helpful in increasing my audience - but last year I only competed in a few. I want my convention experience to be more relaxed now! I pick and choose which ones to attend. In truth, some of the smaller shows are way better organised than the bigger ones.

Are your sponsorships important to you? How did they come about?

Most of my sponsorships came about during conventions. That's another great thing about being visible on the convention circuit. Others came through instagram. They just happened... Sponsorship is a beautiful thing. It works for both artist and sponsor. It's mutual. So yeah, it's very important to me.

Which machines do you use?

I work with HM tattoo machines from Spain because they sponsor me! The only other machines I use are my Dan Kubins – specifically for my thick lines, because that's what I'm used to. But my set-up always contains three HM machines. They're ideally suited to my work because they're very stable and precise, and that's what helps me do solid, clean, accurate tattoos.

Tattooing can be a demanding business, with intense emotional and physical pressures on the tattooist. How do you deal with this?

You're right – it is truly demanding, but that's completely fine. I'm grateful that my job is something I love so much. One thing I do to minimise stress is try to draw my designs way in advance. Sometimes you can't avoid a last-minute rush though. I also try to answer all my requests and enquiries quickly, which helps to make everything easier in the long run. As for physical pressure, yeah, tattooing is freaking brutal. Especially if you travel a lot. I have some hip and lower back problems, so I try to swim three times a week, or do other exercises when I can't go swimming.





Any advice for those starting out in tattooing?

Well I'm the kind of guy who believes anything is possible. Of course it's not always easy, but if you find it, want it, love it, chase it and do whatever it takes no matter what, you'll get there! I was a hairdresser doing graffiti... and now I'm tattooing! This is what I truly love and it's what I've fought for.

@aber_tattooer
@knifepartytattoo

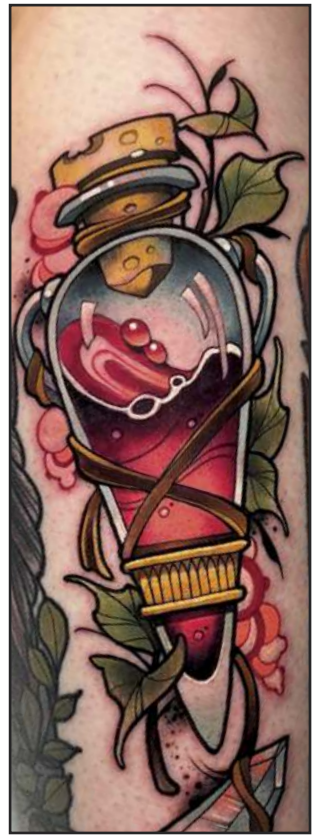
Knife Party Tattoo
Sintagmatarchou Davaki 17
Kallithea 176 72
Greece
Tel +30 21 0958 9538



PORTFOLIO-JORZ

MIND AT LARGE (GERMANY)





PORTFOLIO-ALICE TOTEMICA

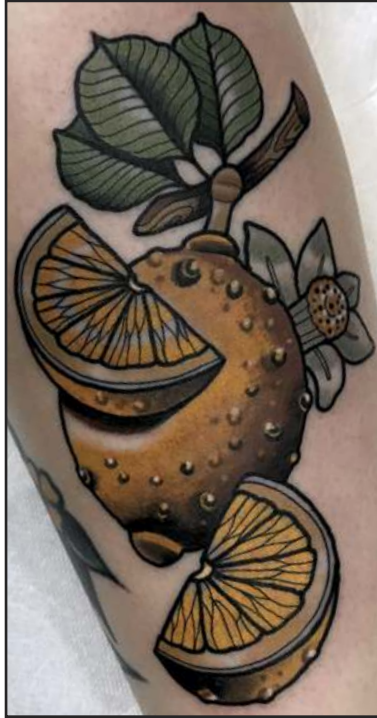
ON THE ROAD





PORTFOLIO-JODY DAWBER

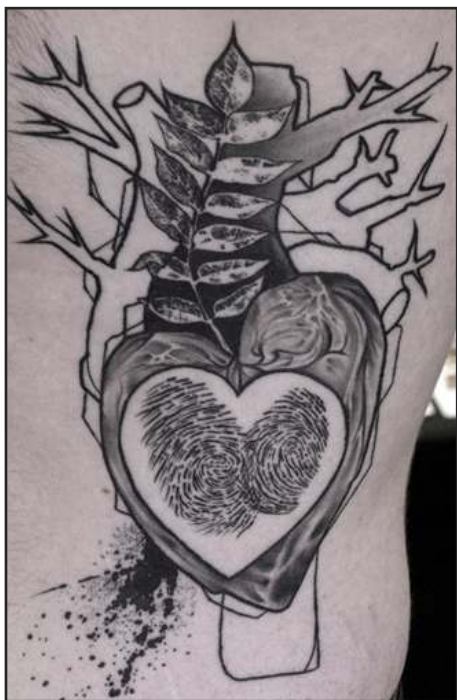
DOLOROSA TATTOO (USA)





PORTFOLIO-GZY EX SILESIA

INKDEPENDENT TATTOO





DE ART



Dominika Dolata, aka De Art, is a young digital artist producing remarkably accomplished work in a highly competitive field. Her portraits almost always feature tattooed people, and she is steadily building a fanbase in her native Poland and beyond.

Tell us a little about yourself and your artistic background.

Well, I live in Poland. Drawing and painting were my favourite things to do when I was a kid. When I was at school, my uncle was an art teacher and he was the one who told me art should be my direction in life. I went to art college, and I also did a masters degree in photography. For a while I made digital art for games (mainly the texturing of 3D objects) and then I got into digital painting. That's when I found my style! I've been doing this for around six years now.





Have you always enjoyed creating digital art?

Actually I was always more into 'traditional' media before I left college. At college, I loved drawing in pencil and charcoal, painting in acrylic, and printmaking techniques such as drypoint. But after graduating I decided to buy a graphics tablet and try something different. At first, I found it really strange to draw on the tablet and see the results quite separately on the computer screen, but I soon got used to it. The best thing about digital art is that you can try out multiple versions. It's so easy to make changes. Other than that, it's just the same as when you're using a more traditional medium.

How do you create your digital paintings?

I use a Wacom graphics tablet and Photoshop. First I select the photo I'm going to use for reference (or use the one I've been asked to paint - often people message me directly asking me to paint them). Then next to it, I open a





clean page in Photoshop. I start with a simple line drawing, based on the photo. Then I build the colours and incorporate shadows and highlights, mixing and blurring them to give a smoother look and adding some nice contours.

At what stage do you draw in the tattoos?

That's the next step. I try to match the tattoo style to the person in the picture. Usually all the tattoos will be by the same artist – and they're always artists that I know or admire. Most of the people in my paintings are heavily tattooed.

What's the next stage?

After I've drawn in the tattoos, I add the whites that give my work its characteristic gloss and shine. I always remember my painting teacher at college telling me not to use so much white in my portraits – because there's no white when you look at a person in real life – but now I can do it in my own way, and this is one of the elements that gives my work its particular 'look'. Then I do the background and the piece is complete. Usually, it takes me around four to six hours from start to finish, depending on how complex it is, and whether it's just a face or a whole body.

And what do you actually sell?

I never sell multiple copies of my pieces. I sell only one – digital and/or printed on canvas. That way, all my art is exclusive, and I think that's important. If you buy a piece from me, no one else will have the same one. In the past, people sometimes downloaded my work and sold it as their own, but now I watermark all my pieces and add copyright information and I find it isn't happening so much.





You often make work based on existing photographs of models and celebrities...

Yes, and usually I send them the finished art as a surprise present! I do the same for the tattooists whose designs I use in my paintings. 99% of the time people are very happy and love the result. Most of the time they post it on their pages and share it - which makes me really happy too. Occasionally they even ask for the printed version. That happened with Nergal of Polish metal band Behemoth. He put it in a charity auction of fan art and it was the most popular item! Obviously when I represent tattoos I always credit and tag the artist. There have been a few occasions when they've asked me not to use their work, and of course I've always gone along with their request.

Where do you work? Are your surroundings important to you when you're working?

I work from home. I have a room in my flat where I have my pc and graphics

tablet; the walls are covered with my paintings, printed on canvas and mounted in wooden frames, and there are lots of plants all around. I always listen to music while I work, and my dog Mary sleeps near my desk. I prefer working in my own place, but I could work anywhere, as long as I had my graphics tablet and access to Photoshop. In general I'm an introverted person; having a routine is important to me and I like nice surroundings. While I was living with my ex-fiancé (who is now a good friend) he used to tattoo people in this room as well. It didn't bother me at all. When I work, I'm so focused on what I'm doing I go into a kind of trance! I try to produce at least one piece of art per day. Firstly because it's my job and I need the money to pay my bills and stuff, but secondly to improve my skills. I can see a real difference between the work I was doing, say, three years ago and what I am producing now. It's really motivating when I realise how much I've progressed.



Some would you say your work reinforces a stereotypical view of an idealised female body...

That's a question that has to be asked, and it's a difficult issue. In a way my work challenges those norms because tattoos (and especially women's tattoos) are still not fully accepted in society as a whole. But I'm aware that the type of look I tend to choose might also contribute to reinforcing stereotypes and endorsing unattainable ideals. However, it's what my clients want. And since my art is my main source of income, I respond to the demand. Most of my clients are women, or men who want pictures of their (female) partners. But I realise that as an artist I have the power to influence society to some degree, and I wish to support all women to feel beautiful and desirable. That's partly why I've decided to paint more plus-size, curvy girls this year. Everyone is beautiful; and it's people's inner beauty that I'm trying to depict too, which sometimes people can't see for themselves. As to the reason why I paint mostly women... well it's simply that I prefer painting women to men!

You recently did a magazine cover for CKM.

Yes, CKM is a really well known men's lifestyle magazine in Poland. I decided to try my luck and wrote an e-mail to the editor – and he wrote right back and said 'Yes, let's do it!' They sent me an image from the photoshoot and I painted it in my style. The special thing about it was that this was their very last printed issue, so it was a great honour to be part of their goodbye number.

And you also did the cover for the January 2020 issue of Polish tattoo magazine TattooFest. How did that come about?

I got a message on instagram proposing an interview. I was more than happy to do it, because I know they're very choosy with their content so it felt like a real compliment. Then a few days after the interview they asked me if I would also do the cover! I have a friend who's an alternative model. I love drawing her, so I asked if she would pose for it. And I asked my own tattooist Laura, from Candy Ink / ink.fluence (in Poland), if I could include some of her tattoo designs. Both said yes, and that's how it came about.





We hear that you tattoo in your spare time...

Yes, but it's usually on fake skin, just to practice. Sometimes I do small tattoos for my friends. I'm doing it because I want to learn a new art medium. Who knows, one day I might become a tattooist, but for now I'm focused on my digital art. The nice thing is that I have friends who own tattoo shops and they tell me that whenever I'm ready, the door is open for me!

Presumably realism would be your tattoo style?

Yes, as an artist I like realism and semi-realism. So probably as a tattooist I would do the same, except on human skin instead of my graphics tablet. Everything's possible - I'm still young! In terms of the tattoos on my own body though, I prefer neo-trad. Laura, my tattooist, is amazing. We're working on my sleeves at the moment.

What are your dreams for the future?

I love what I do. One of my dreams is to open a small gallery. I would display and sell my own work there, and also the work of young, unknown artists to give them a helping hand at the beginning of their career, when it can be so hard. And I would like my art to be recognised not just in Poland but around the world. Hopefully that will happen one day!

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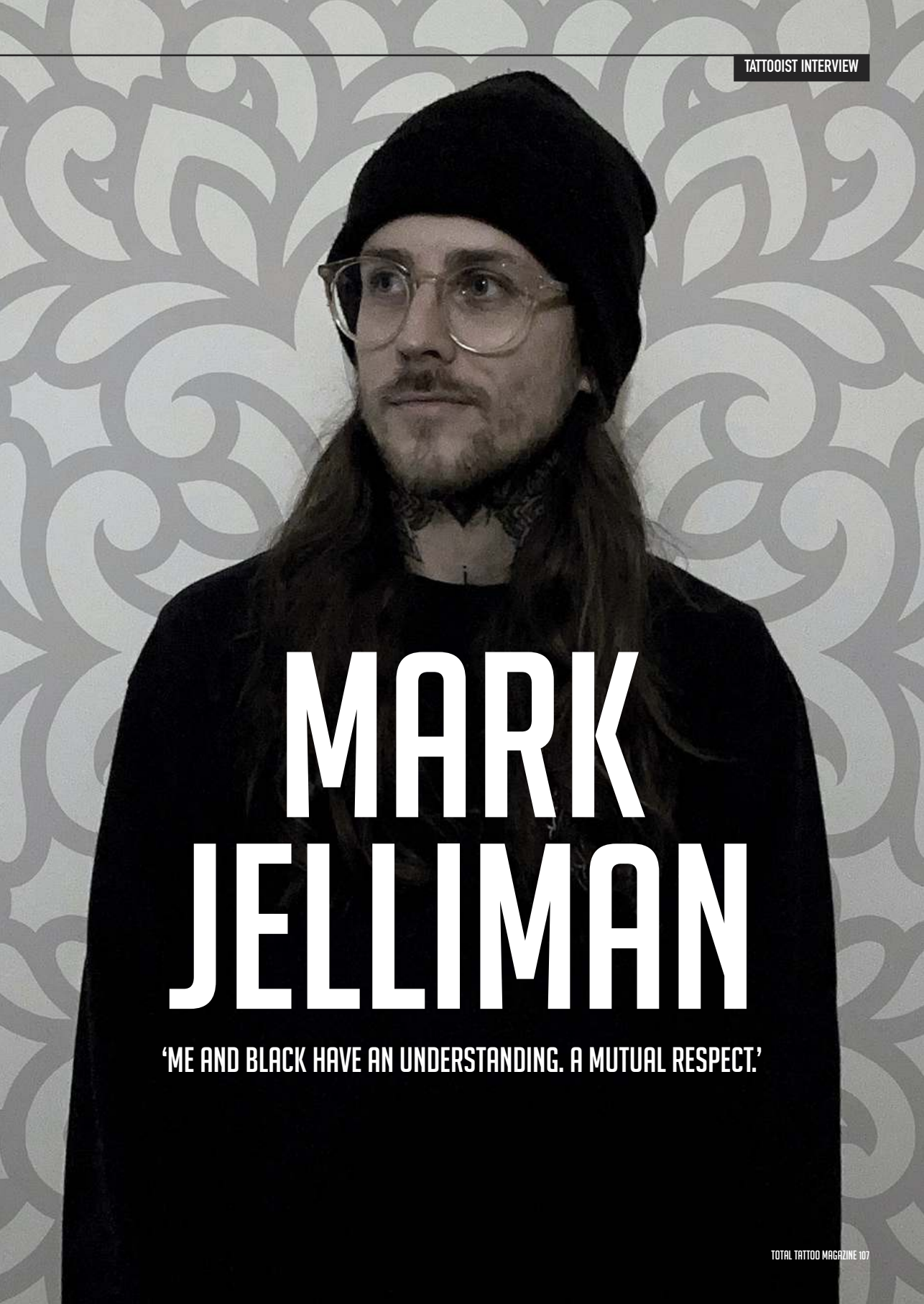
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Mark Jelliman recently opened his own private studio in a self-contained basement in Rochester, Kent. Known for the pinpoint accuracy of his beautiful symmetrical blackwork and his free-flowing solid black peonies, Mark is thoughtful, humble and incredibly focused in his pursuit of perfection. We chatted in his studio, which has possibly the most minimal décor I have ever seen and sterile conditions to rival an operating theatre.

"It's almost dangerous how focused I've become in the pursuit of perfection," Mark admits. "I'm so hard on myself. Everything has to be 110%. I'm always forgetting to eat and drink... I'll be driving home feeling physical ill and destroyed, and then basically consume all my daily food in one go!"

A portrait of Mark Jelliman, a tattooist, wearing a black beanie, glasses, and a black t-shirt. He has long hair and a goatee. The background is a light gray wall with a repeating pattern of stylized, swirling floral or leaf motifs. The text 'MARK JELLIMAN' is overlaid in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters.

MARK JELLIMAN

'ME AND BLACK HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING. A MUTUAL RESPECT.'



"I'm my own worst enemy. The moment I wake up I start working through a list of what I have to do that day, and it's not until the tattoo machine starts up that I can finally calm down and focus. Tattooing used to be the most stressful part of my day but now it's the most relaxing. Once I'm in the studio I can finally be in control. I need things to be done a certain way to appease my OCD; in any other business that could be a real pain, but in tattooing I think it's almost a benefit."

"From the moment I first guested in a private studio, I thought WOW this is amazing," he continues. "It's just you and your client. And my clients love it when they see this place. It's so quiet and peaceful here. When I'm working, I simply don't answer the door." Privacy is helped by the fact that Mark's studio is actually pretty hard to find, even though it's only a few minutes walk from the station. "I'm so into this space," he confesses, "I've become resistant to working anywhere else! I just do a couple of guest spots or conventions each year, and mainly in places where I've worked before."





Mark can only be contacted through social media. "I've not taken a booking outside of Instagram for about four years," he explains, "and I do pretty much everything via email. I don't really like face-to-face consultations. I prefer to have a picture in front of me and sit and have a cup of tea and think about it. I'm also terrible at pricing stuff up on the spot. At conventions I need to have the numbers written on the back of the designs. I hate talking money. I remember the first time I worked at London rates, I was shocked; I didn't feel I was worthy. I never believe the good things people say about my work..."



Mark is one of those rare tattooists who actually did a full apprenticeship in a shop near to where he lived. "Yeah, I scrubbed the floors and cleaned the tubes and everything. And I learnt all about hygiene - properly. For me it's the most important thing, far more important than anything else. I have a designated work area that I keep as sterile as possible, and if I do a guest spot I start by cleaning the whole area even if it's 'clean' already. Everything I use is disposable. I believe tattooists need to be regulated much more strictly. It would be good if there was some kind of partnership between knowledgeable tattooists and environmental health officers to raise the standard of the whole inspection process."

"I've been tattooing since 2014," Mark continues. "Before that I was studying art and graphic design at university, and working on the vans delivering for ASDA at night. One of the other van drivers had a tattoo done, and he told the tattooist about me. The guy asked to see my work and offered me an apprenticeship! It was the perfect way to get started. Tattooing is so much better than being a graphic designer because you get to be properly creative without having to bend your ideas to suit a whole committee of people who each have their own take on the concept."

Whilst waiting to get his own place sorted, Mark tattooed at South City Market in New Cross. "Everyone's really cool there. It's a great shop, more like a collective." With so many shops now being run in this way, I ask Mark if he sees it as a symptom of an evolving industry. "Tattooing is constantly changing," he says, "but it's a slow change, the kind of the thing you don't necessarily notice from the inside. A bit like watching your own hair grow." A perfect description.



Mark has clearly established himself with a very strong style. "My work is always bespoke and original," he emphasises. "I never do anything twice. The majority of people get it. They want something that is unique and just for them." Most of his clients give him free rein, especially with his flowers. "But I do a lot of compositions that allow people to have a bit of choice," he adds.

"I do everything by email, as I mentioned. Occasionally we make changes on the day – after all, I want my clients to be happy! – but really I like to have the tattoo designed and sorted before the client turns up. Because all my clients send me pictures of themselves, I find I can usually draw stencils and they just seem to fit right first time. It's uncanny. Almost instinctive. I can't describe the process in words; it just works.



And if it doesn't, and I put the stencil on and something's not right, I look at it for ages, or view it through my phone or in a mirror to get a fresh angle on it, and usually that illuminates what's not right."

Mark has two very distinct approaches, according to the work he is producing. "The symmetrical geometric stuff requires great discipline," he explains, "but the flowers don't follow the form of the body in the same way. They have a more natural placement and flow, so they look like they're growing on someone."



"With the ornamental work, I look through antiquarian books for inspiration. I study architecture too - particularly old Indian architecture. But I never use anything directly. If you can create your own patterns and textures, and people begin to identify a style of work as yours, that's when you know you've knocked it out of the park."

"With my solid black flowers, I used to do all the lines first then go back and colour in the black - but now I colour as I go along. If I'm doing a sleeve of flowers I get each flower finished in its entirety before moving on to the next. That way, it's settling in as you go. Solid black is so easy to misrepresent if you don't give it enough time to settle. Before the tattoo is finished, I soak it in watered-down soap to show up the imperfections that you wouldn't see if it was dry."



I ask Mark if he ever feels the need to go wild with a bit of colour. "Not any more," he tells me. "I used to do colour trad back in the day, but I gave it up. In retrospect, perhaps I didn't give it enough time or effort, but I was seeing people who could pack colour with no blood, saturated to fuck, and whenever I tried it, it just looked shit. But whenever I did black, it went in so well! I just think me and black have an understanding. A mutual respect."



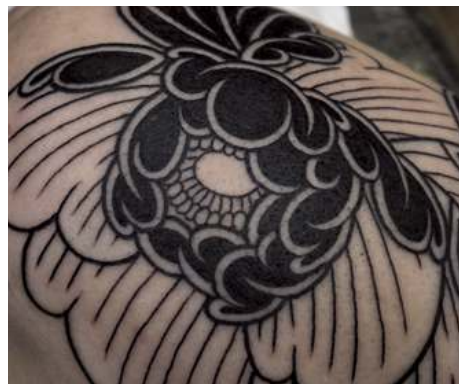
The consistency of line and super flat black in Mark's work demonstrates what can be achieved with a rock-solid understanding of your equipment. "For me, my machines are key," he says. "I've tried using coils for line work as many people suggest, but I've found that rotaries are so much more consistent. The needle has no movement at all. Once you find a set-up that you like and that works for you, you tend to stick to it - and I've tried everything! I've got so many machines... because of all the times I've bitten the bullet and bought something, only to discover that I hate it. Now that I've got my set-up sorted, I make sure I have several back-ups of everything. If someone comes to me to be tattooed the last thing I want to do is let them down because of my equipment. You really have to invest in your set-up."

"The needles that I use are just perfect," Mark continues. "I use Black Claw for the bold lines and Magic Moon for everything else. Magic Moon are a



German-based company and their attention to detail is amazing. The first time I used them, I asked for a certain size liner and they had dozens of variations of the same size, each slightly different and offering a different aesthetic." I ask Mark if he uses bigger needle groupings for the more expansive areas on his larger pieces. "No, I use the same size," he tells me, "because it goes in well and heals well. Lots of people do use larger needles, but with time a tattoo will spread and you need to accommodate for that. I know what works for me and I'll stick to it."

Mark sets himself immense challenges in his work. Doing what he does – so well – is incredibly difficult. He tells me one of the hardest things is to pick up a line that has fallen too short. "If I'm tattooing over a shoulder, for example, and the needle falls a little too shallow and you need to pick it up with a tight five, going back in exactly where you came out is the hardest thing – especially when you're doing symmetrical geometry and you have to get both sides of the design perfect. And doing a curve away is so much easier than pulling a line towards yourself," he continues. "There have been times when I've had to be stern with my customers and get them to sit in silence, and even tell them to stop breathing. I hold my breath too, when I pull a line. Especially in the centre of a flower. You can fuck that bit up so easily. I kind of love that pressure. I love knowing it's difficult. It puts a smile on my face."





would be the point of that? When you start doing symmetrical mirrored pieces you bring yourself into a beautiful world of pain. I've done so many linos where I've been maybe 14 hours into it and I've slipped on one line and had to throw it away and start again..."

"I want to get to the point where my art is on a par with my tattooing," Mark tells me. "I'm planning for the future really. It would be naïve not to. I know I won't be able to tattoo forever. I go home now knackered from a day's work; in five or ten years' time I may not be able to sustain it. I eat healthily and I don't really drink, and I go to see a chiropractor too – not because there's anything wrong with my back right now, but I want to pre-empt anything that might happen. If you do screw your back up, you can become unemployed really fast. Every tattooist should look to the future. This job is so intense."



"I believe that if you aim for 110%, then you stand a chance of getting close to 100%. I know some people say the imperfections are an important element, but No – just No! My iPad will create a perfectly symmetrical image and my printer will keep it symmetrical and my stencil machine will make a perfect stencil, so I have to raise my game to tattoo it in that same perfect way."

One of the things Mark does to relax is printmaking. "When I moved into digital drawing, I felt I was losing touch with physical art. The creative part of me started to feel a bit sad – not that tattooing isn't a creative outlet, but I just wanted to be making something with my hands. Plus, if I'm making prints people who want one of my designs but maybe haven't got room on their body, or don't want a tattoo, can still have some of my art in their house. Another reason I started doing it is that I wanted to leave more of a footprint of my creative self in the world. Tattooing is permanent of course, but only for the duration of the life of the person wearing it."

Mark creates extraordinary linocuts, and it's no surprise that he sets himself extremely high standards in their execution. "Asymmetrical prints would be fairly easy to do, but making them symmetrical makes it 100% harder. That's the way my mind works," he tells me. "It has to be massively challenging. Obviously I could so easily create the images on the iPad and draw half and flip it, but what

Let's hope Mark continues to produce his amazing tattoos for a good few years yet in his beautiful private studio. As he says, "The whole mantra of this place is about giving the client the best tattoo experience possible, which is why it's called Mantra Studio." So how does he see his work developing? "I keep looking for ways to improve," he tells me. "I want to be doing larger-scale work. And I want to innovate with my black backgrounds. I want to find a way to make patterns subtly work alongside floral and blackwork in a manner that hasn't been done by any other tattooist. It's so difficult not to be influenced subconsciously by what you see on Instagram. Ten years ago you could be producing work that was really similar to someone in Russia and you would never know. Today, that can't happen! I don't want to pick up anyone else's style, which is why I only go onto Instagram at the end of the day to post and check messages, and then I'm off it."

"If you really want to progress in this world of tattooing, it takes an amazing amount of anguish and pressure," Mark continues. "To develop something new and perfect – something that you can then hold on to and keep as your own – takes an incredible toll, physically and especially mentally, and this affects a lot of tattooists. I raise money for mental health charities by selling my prints, but I don't like to make a thing of it because it's not about me and my ego; it's just a little something that I can put back."

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indigotattooandpiercing@gmail.com
www.indigotattoo.co.uk

Immortal Ink

39 - 43 Baddow Road, Chelmsford,

CM2 0DB
01245 493 444
contact@immortalink.co.uk
www.immortalink.co.uk

Jayne Doe Tattoo

60 Station Lane, Hornchurch,
RM12 6NB
01708 479 366
jaynedoessex@gmail.com
IG: @jaynedoetattoo
FB: /jaynedoetattoo

Next Generation

4 Wolverton Road, Stony Stratford,
Milton Keynes, MK11 1DX
01908 560003
info@nextgenerationtattoo.co.uk
www.nextgenerationtattoo.co.uk

Skin Sorcerer

116 High Street, Maldon, CM9 5ET
01621 842443
IG: @skin_sorcerer

True Love Tattoos

16 Bridewell Alley, Norwich,
NR2 1AQ
01603 613277
tlnorwich@gmail.com
www.tlnorwich.co.uk

Wolf & Arrows Tattoos

57 St Johns Street, Bury St Edmunds,
IP33 1SJ
01284 701643
IG: @wolfandarrows
FB: /wolfandarrowstattoo

LONDON

The Blue Tattoo

2 Studland Street, Hammersmith,
London, W6 0JS
0208 746 3133
info@thebluetattoo.co.uk
www.thebluetattoo.co.uk
IG: @thebluetattoolondon

Briar Rose Tattoo

172 Manor Lane, London, SE12 8LP
private and custom only studio
www.briarrosetattoo.com
IG: @briarrosetattoo
IG: @tiggytattoos
IG: @olivetats

Diamond Heart Tattoo Studio

223 Broadway, Bexleyheath, DA6 7EJ

0208 304 1414
bookings@diamondhearttattoo.com
www.diamondhearttattoo.com
IG: @diamondhearttattoo
FB: /diamondhearttattoo

The Family Business

58 Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell,
London, EC1R 4QE
0207 278 9526
info@thefamilybusinesstattoo.com
www.thefamilybusinesstattoo.com

Frith Street Tattoo

18 Frith Street (Basement), Soho,
London, W1D 4RQ
020 7734 8180
frithstreettattoo.london@gmail.com
www.frithstreettattoo.co.uk

Fudoshin Tattoo

158 George Lane, South Woodford,
London, E18 1AY
020 8989 6144
www.fudoshintattoos.com
IG: @fudoshintattoos
FB: /fudoshintattoos

Happy Sailor Tattoo

17 Hackney Road, London, E2 7NX
020 7033 9222
Email: Via website
www.happysailortattoo.com

I Hate Tattoos

Unit 1, 400-405 York Way, London,
N7 9LR
07904 174 819
herringfishbloke@hotmail.co.uk
FB: /IHateTattoosStudio

Ink Lounge Tattoo Studio

310C Green Lanes, Palmers Green,
London, N13 5TT
0203 490 2663
info@inklounge.co.uk
www.inklounge.co.uk
IG: @inklounge

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SE9 1DD
020 8617 3338
Inksmithsoflondon@gmail.com
IG: @InksmithsofLondon

Kilburn Original Tattoo

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Kilburn, London, NW6 7HY

0207 372 3662
info@kilburnoriginal.com
IG: @kilburntattoo

Leviticus Tattoo Emporium

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leviticustattoo@hotmail.com
www.leviticustattooemporium.co.uk

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IG: @lowridertattoolondon

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lowtidetattoo@gmail.com
IG: @lowtidetattoo

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www.newwavetattoo.co.uk

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sevendoorstattoo@gmail.com
IG: @sevendoorstattoo

Tattoo Shop By Dan Gold

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W1D 1LP
0207 637 7411
www.tattooshopbydangold.co.uk

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Cheriton, Queens Crescent, London,
NW5 4EZ
www.thegoodfighttattoo.com
IG: @nick_whybrow
IG: @heidikayetattoo
IG: @emilyrabbit.tattoo

Through My Third Eye

342 Hornsey Road, London, N7 7HE
0203 417 2552
throughmythirdeye@outlook.com
www.throughmythirdeye.com

Ushuaia Tattoo London

486 Fulham Road, SW6 5NH
020 8616 1760
www.ushuaiatattoo.com
IG: @ushuaiatattoo.london
FB: /ushuaiatattoo.london

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55-57 Grosvenor Road, Tunbridge
Wells, TN1 2AY
01892 458342
fourteenarrows@hotmail.com

1770 Tattoo

4 Little East Street, Brighton,
BN1 1HT
01273 710 730
info@1770tattoo.com
www.1770tattoo.com

Dead Slow

9 Boyces Street, Brighton, BN1 1AN
01273 208844
www.deadslowco.com
contact@deadslowco.com
IG: @deadslowco
FB: /deadslowco

Electricthaiger Tattoo

2 Station Parade, Tweedy Road
Bromley, BR1 3NN
0208 460 6160
info@electricthaigertattoo.co.uk
FB: /Electricthaigertattoo
IG: @electricthaigertattoo

Fine Art Tattoo and Piercing Studio

6 York Street, Ramsgate, CT11 9DS
01843 588 885
fine-art-tattoo@hotmail.co.uk
www.finearttattoo.co.uk

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01280 822 695
forever-wear-tattoos@hotmail.co.uk
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IG: @foreverwear_tattoos
FB: /foreverweartattoosbuckingham

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01273 809 903
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IG: @goldironstattooclub
FB: /goldironstattooclub

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higginsandco71@gmail.com
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Whitstable, CT5 1HX
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zbreakspear@yahoo.com
IG: @high_tide_tattoo_studio
FB: /hightidetattooostudio

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FB: /magnumopustattoo

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www.risingphoenixtattoo.co.uk
IG: @RisingPhoenixLeightonBuzzard
FB: /rptattoo

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www.sevensinstattoo.co.uk/

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www.skinnedalivetattoo.com
IG: @skinnedalivetattoo

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Road, Brighton, BN1 6DN
01273 564494
www.smbtattoo.com
IG: @smbtattoo
FB: /smbtattoo

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32 Middle Village, Bolnore, Haywards
Heath, RH16 4GH
01444454411
info@tattoo-fx.co.uk
www.tattoo-fx.co.uk

The Hidden Tannery

10-11 Lewes Road, Brighton,
BN2 3HP
hello@hiddentannery.com
www.hiddentannery.com

Valhalla Tattoo

215 High Street, Bromley, BR1 1NY
Tel no: 0208 313 9470
info@valhallatattoo.co.uk
www.facebook.com/valhallatattoo215

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Black Chalice Tattoo

Unit 4, Plaza 21, Edgeware Road,
Swindon, SN1 1HE
01793 671 432
blackchalicetattoo@hotmail.com
FB: /blackchalicetattoo

Blackfriars Tattoo

5 Maylord Street, Hereford,
HR12DS
01432 278330
blackfriarstattoo@gmail.com
IG: @blackfriarstattoo

Crow Quill

63 Bedford Place, Southampton,
SO15 2DS
023 8034 0058

IG: @thecrowquill
www.thecrowquill.co.uk

The Custom Propaganda Tattoo Company

Unit 7, Botley Mills, Botley,
Southampton, SO30 2GB
01489 325 341
IG: @custompropagandatattoo
FB: /CustomPropagandaTattoo

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EX33 2JS
Phone: 01271 523732
www.eightfoldtattoo.com
IG: @eightfoldtattoo

Needle and Fred Tattoo

22 High Street, Littlehampton,
BN17 5EE
01903 733 622
needleandfred@live.co.uk
IG: @inkfred

North Gate Tattoo

13 Northgate Street, Bath, BA1 5AS
info@northgatetattoo.com
www.northgatetattoo.com

Purple Rose Tattoo

56 Staple Hill Road, Fishponds,
Bristol, BS16 5BS
01173 300 123
purplerosetattoo@hotmail.co.uk
www.purplerosetattoo.co.uk

WALES

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38 Singleton Street, Swansea,
SA1 3QN
01792 455 000
broadsidewanseahotmail.com
IG: @broadsidewanseahotmail.com

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FB: /keepthefaitthsocialclub

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07413 383 323
sstattooacardiff@gmail.com
www.surrealisticsanctuary.co.uk

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01834 860 616
www.sursumtattoo.com
sursumtattoo@gmail.com
IG: @sursumtattoo
FB: /sursumtattoo

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IG: @bwtattoostudios
FB: /BWtattoostudios

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GL52 2NE
01242 352 306
hello@bloodandhoney.uk
www.bloodandhoney.uk

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07863 135814
cmitattoo@gmail.com
www.cmi-tattoo.com

The Church Tattoo

11 Church Road, Redditch,
B97 4AB
01527 759 852
thechurchtattoo@hotmail.com
FB: /thechurchtattoo

Folklore Tattoo

119 Lichfield Street, Tamworth,

B79 7QB

01827 768446

folkloretattoos@live.com

www.folkloretattooostudio.co.uk

Imperial Art Tattoo

20 King Street, Bedworth,
CV12 8HT
0247 664 0947
www.imperialarttattoo.co.uk
IG: @imperialarttattoo
FB: /imperialarttattoo

Modern Electric Tattoo Co

147 Golden Cross Lane, Catshill,
Bromsgrove, B61 0JZ
01527 759434
info@modernelectrictattoo.co.uk
www.modernelectrictattoo.co.uk

Nala Tattoo & Piercing Studio

81 Bolebridge Street, Tamworth,
B79 7PD
01827 68 353
contact@nalastudio.co.uk
www.nalastudio.co.uk

Second City Tattoo Club

91 Vittoria Street, Birmingham,
B1 3PA
IG: @secondcitytattooclub
FB: /secondcitytattooclub

Seven Foxes Tattoo

3 Kingsfield Road, Birmingham,
B14 7JN
0121 610 0348
sevenfoxestattoo@gmail.com
www.sevenfoxestattoo.com
IG: @sevenfoxestattoo

Sweet Life Gallery

80 Bristol Street, Birmingham,
B5 7AH
0121 692 1361
Enquiry@sweetlifegallery.co.uk
www.sweetlifegallery.co.uk

The Ink Spot

The Parade, Silverdale, Newcastle
Under Lyme, ST5 6LQ
01782 619144
tattoosbycookie@hotmail.com
www.theinkspotuk.com

Vicious Pink Tattoo

Suite C, 9a Willow Street, Oswestry,
SY11 1AF
01691 570 427
viciouspinktattoo@gmail.com
www.viciouspink.co.uk

NORTH WEST

Ace Kustom Tattoo

78 Church Road
Manchester, M22 4NW
Tel no: 0161 945 8433
acekustomtattoos@gmail.com

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01229 838 946
allstyletattoos@gmail.com
FB: /allstyletattoosbarrow

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The Old Church, Lancaster, LA1 1UU
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01244 297 528
theblackfreightertattoo.co@gmail.com
FB: /TheBlackFreighterTattooCo

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Charleston House, 12 Rumford
Place, Liverpool, L3 9DG
0151 227 1814
boldasbrasstattoo@gmail.com
www.boldasbrasstattoo.com

Bridge Street Tattoo

32 Bridge Street W, Chester,
CH1 1NN
01244 638 765
bridgestreettattoo@gmail.com
www.bridgestreettattoo.co.uk
IG: @bridgestreettattoo
FB: /bridgestreettattoochester

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14 Crompton Street, Wigan,
WN1 1YP
07849 114 380
www.ButchersBlockTattoo.co.uk
ButchersBlockTattoo@hotmail.com
IG: @ButchersBlockTattoo
FB: /ButchersBlockTattoo

Dabs Tattoo

78b Eastbourne Road, Southport,
PR8 4DU
01704 566 665
Dabstattoos@btconnect.com
IG: @tattoosatdabs
FB: /dabstattoo/DABS Tattoo

Indelible Ink

3 York Avenue, Thornton-Cleveleys,
FY5 2UG
01253 280 457
www.indelibleinktattooostudio.co.uk
IG: @indelible_ink_tattoos
FB: /indelibleinkuk

Infernal Rites Tatoo

71 Market St, Westhoughton, Bolton,
BL5 3AA
01942 811 132
infernalritestattoo@gmail.com
IG: @infernalritestattoo
FB: /infernalritestattoo

Inkden Tattoo & Piercing Studio

50 B Coronation Street, Blackpool
FY1 4PD
07957 021 702
inkden.tattoo@gmail.com
www.inkdentattoo.co.uk

Inked Up Chester

21 Eastgate Row North, Chester,
CH1 1LQ
01244 638 558
info@inkedupchester.co.uk
IG: @inkedupchester

Marked for life

45 High Street, (Winpenny House)
Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1SB
01642 641 235
tattoomfl@gmail.com
www.marked-for-life.com

Market Quarter Tattoo

14 Market Street, Southport,
Merseyside, PR8 1HJ
marketquartertattoo@gmail.com
FB: /MQTSouthport
IG: @marketquartertattoo

Rapture Tattoo

Unit 1, First Floor, Greenside Mill,
Droylsden, M43 7AJ
info@rapture.tattoo
www.rapturetattoo.co.uk
IG: @rapturetattoo
FB: /rapturetattoo

Sacred Art Tattoo

497 Barlow Moor Road, Chorlton,
Manchester, M21 8AG
0161 881 1530
tattoo@sacredarttattoo.co.uk
www.sacredarttattoo.co.uk

Skin Kandi Tattoo Studio

50a Westfield Street, St Helens
Merseyside, WA10 1QF
01744 734 699
skinkandi@hotmail.co.uk
www.skinkandi.co.uk

Studio78 Tattoos

15 Earle Street, Crewe, CW1 2BS
01270 581 581
studio-78@hotmail.co.uk
www.studio-78.co.uk

True Colours Tattoo Studio

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PR1 3NU
01772 378 565
www.truecolourstattoo.co.uk
Instagram: @truecolourstattoo

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CONVENTION CALENDAR

2020 UK CONVENTIONS

February 28th-1st March

Tattoo Tea Party

Event City, Manchester
www.tattoooteaparty.com

25th-26th April Portsmouth Tattoo Fest

Pyramids Centre
www.tattooofest.co.uk

25th-26th April Big North Tattoo Show

Utilita Arena, Newcastle Upon-Tyne,
Arena Way, NE4 7NA.
www.bignorthtattooshow.com

24th-26th April Kent Tattoo Convention

49-51 Marine Terrace, CT9 1XJ.
facebook.com/The-Kent-Tattoo-Convention-401403340342372/

24th-26th April Portsmouth Tattoo Fest

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

2nd-3rd May Brighton Tattoo Convention

Brighton Centre, Brighton,
BNI 2GR.
www.brightontattoo.com

23rd-24th May Totally Inked Tattoo Convention

1 Kingsway, Newport, NP20 1UH.
www.facebook.com/Totallyinkedtattooconvention/

30th-31st May UK Tattoo Fest

Marshall Arena, Milton Keynes.
www.uktattooofest.co.uk

4th-5th July Leeds Tattoo Expo

The first direct arena
Arena Way, Leeds, LS2 8BY.
www.leadstattooexpo.com

bristol

31st July-2nd August 16th London Tattoo Convention

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

14th-16th August Tatcon Blackpool

Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool.
www.tatconblackpool.co.uk

2020 OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

7th-8th March 10th Rotterdam Tattoo Convention

Rotterdam Ahoy, Ahoyweg 10, 3084
BA Rotterdam.
www.unitedconventions.com/rotterdam

13th-15th March Mondial Du Tatouage

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

3rd-5th April Nepal Tattoo Convention

Heritage Garden, (Old Gyanodaya
School) Milap Road, Sanepa, Patan

44600, Nepal.

www.nepaltattooconvention.com

24th-26th April Benidorm Tattoo Convention

Hotel Mediterraneo, Benidorm.
facebook.com/BenidormTattooConvention

7th-9th August Berlin Tattoo Convention

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

12th-13th September Tattoo Assen

De Bonte Weaver, Stadsbroek 17,
9405 BK Assen, Netherlands.
www.tattooexpo.eu/en/assen/2020

21st-23rd March Prison Ink Tattoo Festival

Fussingsvej 8, Horsens, Denmark.

16th-17th May International Moscow Tattoo Convention

Sokolniki Exhibition and Convention
Center, Pavilion No. 4. Moscow, 5th
Ray Prosek 7, Building 1.
en.moscowtattooconvention.com

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