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LIFE AND DEATH WITH
ILJA HUMMEL

THE CUTTING EDGE OF BERLIN
NOÏA

FROM ILLUSTRATION TO INK
JAMIE CHRIST

40,000 TATTOOS AND ARTIVISM IN
PROJECT X



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BIG LOZ

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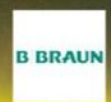
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The Museum of Tattoo Art?

Tattoo Art by Jess Yen

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Gaston Tonus

The Place Behind the Clouds

“Do you have many tattoos?”
“I guess. More than most but not as many as some people I know.”

“We don’t see many tattooed people around here. It’s not really that kind of place.”

And I thought to myself: wait until everybody else gets here and you won’t see as many tattoos in one place ever again. That’s the way it goes at conventions—or at least that would be true if you can get yourself to the right place on the right weekend.

It’s an easy mistake to make because when you’re dropping trips into your calendar, ‘February’ can look an awful lot like ‘March’ in the dark and goes a long way to explain why tattooers sometimes have personal assistants and bands have tour managers.

Still, there are worse places to find yourself than the furthest reaches of eastern Europe in the middle of one of the coldest winters in living memory. Not many but as I sat on a bench outside the hotel, which should have had a sign next to it announcing it was The Coldest Bench In The World, I couldn’t think where that might be.

I re-booked my flight but still had 24 hours to kill before I could get home, so I did what I always do in such situations—I put on my Big Coat (the one I got by trading a cheese and

I NEVER PLANNED TO GET LOST IN A GRAVEYARD A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME



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ham baguette and half a packet of cigarettes with a Russian submarine captain—true story) and headed out to the nearest cemetery to hang out with like minded people.

The afternoon was pleasant enough, it was a good cemetery but afternoon can turn into evening pretty fast in some places. I never planned to get lost in a graveyard a thousand miles from home at night, but here I was all the same. Retracing my steps because a much better place to be right now was in the hotel restaurant, I passed a couple of headstones I vaguely recognised, rounded a sharp corner and bumped into two women standing arm in arm along the path.

A quick scan of them both revealed a tattooed hand on one of them and a conversation ensued in which I only had to take my coat off for less than a minute to give proof of life.

“Do you live here?”

“Yes. Right here.”

They spoke good English. Hell, most everywhere speaks good English when you get off a plane somewhere in Europe.

“I think I’m lost.”

They giggled.

“How can you be lost when we can see you are right here?”

Helpful. I was expecting a little more but if expectation ain't the mother of all disappointment, I don't know what is.

“Would you mind if I walk with you for a little while? Maybe I can get my bearings.”

They both shrugged. This wasn't going to be an easy ride.

“How far away do you live. It's kinda dark and cold for wandering around at night don't you think?”

“We do this every day. Same time, every day.”

“We like to see what's going on in the world and usually there's nothing going on but today, here you are in the world and it was lovely to meet you,” said the other. “We don't see many tattooed people around here.”

“Funny. That's what the hotel receptionist said to me just a few hours ago.”

And in the space in which I looked at my watch to check I was telling the truth—that it was only a few hours ago—they disappeared on me. Not walked away or turned a different corner, but disappeared. Gone. Like they had never been there at all. Ghosts!

There's something a little less perturbing about tattooed European ghosts than ghosts you might see back home (tattooed or otherwise) but a ghost is a ghost and by now, that restaurant really did have a seat with my name on it. I walked fast, found my way out of the Maze of the Dead, back to some kind of civilisation and finally, my hotel.

I went straight up to my room for a shower and washed the dirt away, but for some of us, the dirt will find you no matter how long you stand under the shower-head.

Down in the restaurant, I ordered a burger because the picture on the menu was the only high resolution one on it and sat with a drink, clinking the ice-cubes against the glass while I waited for food to show its face. They must have gone to the source for the ingredients and in the meantime, I fell asleep in my glass.

When the waiter decided it was indeed time to work, he apologised for taking so long and told me they didn't see many tattooed people around here. I nodded sagely having been told nothing else but this all day.

For all of the above reasons, this day was one of the longest days of my life. To blow the



WE DON'T SEE MANY TATTOOED PEOPLE
AROUND HERE...

cobwebs away, I left some cash on the table and went for a walk—nowhere too adventurous—just along the street and always keeping the hotel in sight.

I decided, that when I got home, I would get the ghosts tattooed on my leg so as I wouldn't forget them. Not that I was likely to but hey, there are worse reasons to get tattooed.

As I turned around to head back, a grizzled homeless guy sidled up to me and asked for something in his native tongue. I gave him the change I had in my pocket and he dissolved into tears, tugging at the sleeve of my Big Coat like I had stolen it from his own back but he was the least likely looking submarine captain in the world.

I apologised in English and escaped his grip before his hands burned holes in the sleeves. Putting some distance between us, I started to feel bad. I don't know what he wanted but it was nothing I was prepared to give. I stopped, cupped my hands and shouted up the street in his general direction:

“I want to help you out brother! I want to tell you everything will be OK but I ain't gonna lie to you—the world has gotten pretty weird in this last twenty four hours and I still have a magazine to put to bed...” ▣

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Should you be getting that tattoo if you can't really afford it?

I've just seen a tattoo studio claiming to be the only shop in the UK to offer "finance on tattoos". This concept has got me thinking—not just about tattoos, or even my own spending habits, but the habits of all of us that earn, spend, earn, spend, earn, spend, etc.

Tattoos on finance. Should we really be encouraging people to spend money they don't have on tattoos, or anything for that matter? A tattooist wouldn't be able to count on one (or a hundred) hand(s) the number of customers who have tried to haggle, cancel, moan, back out or back down due to the fact that they've not raised the sufficient funds for their tattoo time. Tattoos remain to be things that you guys WANT, but seem to be unable to budget for.

Juxtaposed with my seeing this studio advert today was my current re-evaluating of my own spending habits—something I'd vowed to do in 2018. For me, if it's in my pocket, I'll spend it. I don't have a penny saved. Life's too short, and all that.

I don't buy expensive clothes. I have a knackered, old car. I don't buy DVDs, games, shoes, bags or the newest electronic items. I don't go on a ritualistic weekend binge night out. When it comes to material goods, I look for a bargain. I sell a lot of stuff on eBay that I don't use anymore. Actually, after a recent proper de-clutter, I'm now embracing a clean, minimalist living environment at home and a clean, minimalist head-space as a result.

Exploring minimalist living and re-evaluating personal spending over the last few months has allowed me to see where and how I spend. Looking back, it's obvious that my number one outgoing is tattoos. Will that ever change? Is it THAT bad that I choose to throw money at decorating my body with these beautiful artworks that I get to keep forever? Hmm. I'm not sure I'll ever kick that habit.

Returning to my original question... you can't really afford it, so should you get it? If you're following my example, then—yes. The answer is—yes. Get the bloody tattoo. But perhaps rather than considering finance, trade in some of your other objects or buying habits as



Chloe Aspey

TRADE THE ADIDAS FOR ART. THE DIOR FOR DECORATION



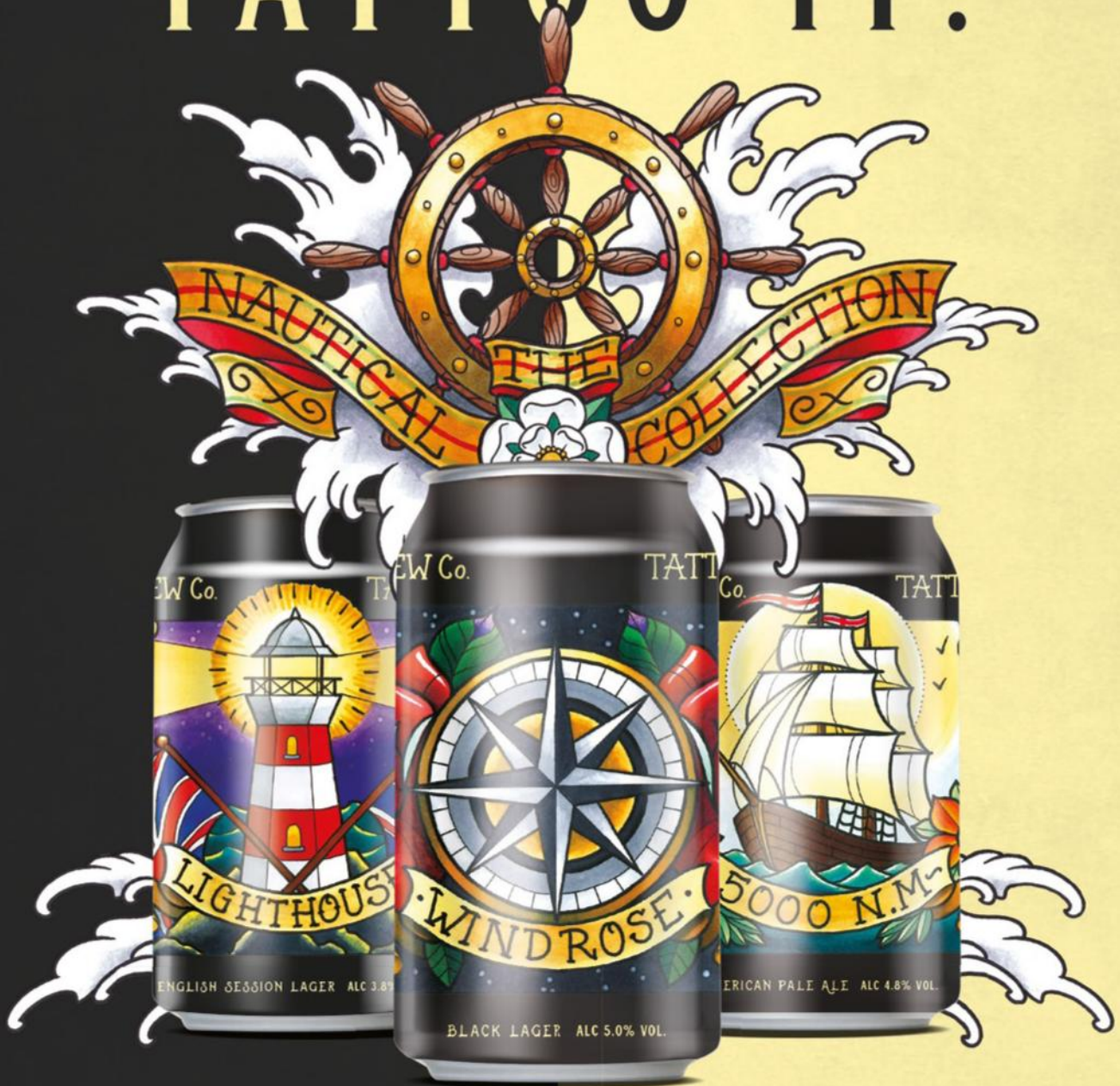
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a sacrifice instead. Have a few less evenings in the pub or trips to Top Shop until you've got the cash for your new ink.

I can look down at my skin (that's looking less and less blank every time I write these columns) and say with complete certainty that it's worth it. Trade the Adidas for art, the Dior for decoration and the Manolos for memories. Trust me, your tattoos aren't belongings that you'll ever want to sell on eBay. ▣

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TATTOO: BRITISH TATTOO ART REVEALED

TORRE ABBEY MUSEUM · Saturday 3 March–Sunday 3 June
www.torre-abbey.co.uk

Tattoo: British Tattoo Art Revealed is a genuinely ground-breaking and comprehensive history of British tattooing, featuring cutting edge designers, leading academics and major private collectors. This is the largest gathering of real objects and original tattoo artwork ever assembled in the UK featuring over 400 original artworks, photographs and historic artefacts.

Challenging pre-conceptions and celebrating tattooing's rich artistic heritage, the exhibition proved hugely successful when it opened at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall following two years of extensive research by the curators at this acclaimed Falmouth attraction. The exhibition at Torre Abbey Museum is the first stop on a nationwide tour.

Cllr Nicole Amil, Executive Lead for Tourism, Culture and Harbours, said: "This extremely impressive exhibition has the largest gathering of real objects and original tattoo artwork ever assembled in the UK with over 400 original artworks, photographs and historic artefacts.

"The exhibition challenges long-standing

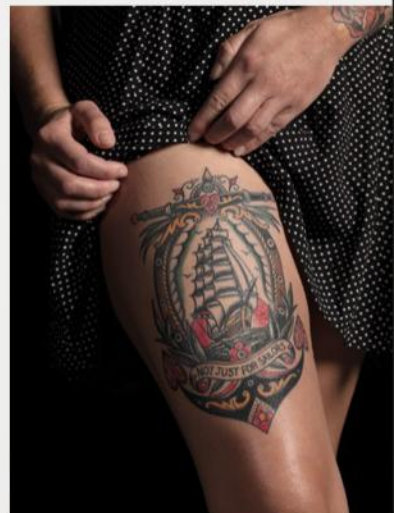
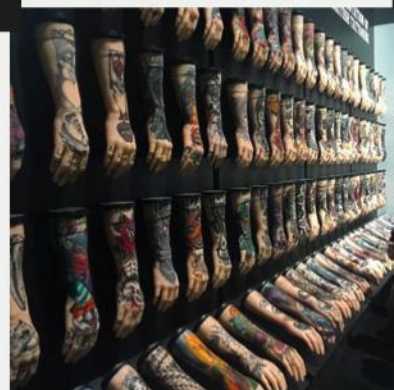
myths and pre-conceptions about tattooing, while at the same time celebrating the astonishingly rich artistic heritage of tattooing in the UK. Even if you do not have a personal interest in tattoos it is fascinating to learn about the artwork, history and different genres of tattoos.

"We are genuinely thrilled to be the first stop on a tour that includes some of the most prestigious museums in the UK, this exhibition complements the Bay's rich maritime, fishing and naval heritage."

Tattoo: British Tattoo Art Revealed is curated by the National Maritime Museum Cornwall, an independent Museum based in Falmouth.

A variety of events will be held in conjunction with the exhibition, while the gift shop at Torre Abbey Museum will also be selling a range of unique tattoo merchandise. Entry to the exhibition is included in the regular ticket price.

For more details on this extraordinary exhibit, times, prices and just about anything else you need to know: torre-abbey.org.uk/whats-on/tattoo-british-tattoo-art-revealed.



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Japan Denied

f savetattooingiverenglish

In his fight for the legalisation of tattooing in Japan, Taiki Masuda has been denied again the right to tattoo without a medical license by the Osaka District Court last September. A judgment which he appealed and should come to an end in 2018, but for the spokesman of a young generation eager to emancipate and live freely its passion, the future of tattooing needs radical decisions



In which state of mind were you after this decision?

I was particularly shocked when the verdict has been announced. It has been a very difficult moment for me. Even now, I still can't express my feelings, I'm devastated. A lot of people supported me and I'm very disappointed not to have been able to satisfy their hopes. I have a lot of regrets. But we appealed the same day of the decision. I'm actually discussing with my lawyers about the strategy to adopt in the future.



Your lawyers were specifically confident about a favourable verdict, how do you explain that decision?

Lawyers, medias, everyone who supported me, we all thought we would win. We all shared the same feeling of deep disappointment. During the verdict I had this impression to hear the arguments of the prosecutor, without adding any concrete arguments. We ran out of time to finish our work about the regulation system regarding the health and sanitation aspects, and also a system based on licenses tattooers should have to work. Maybe the judge's decision would have been different if we had. Whatever, we carry on our process. But, in order for the people to understand the reasons of this problem, we may in the future broaden our audience and talk to the world.

What were the arguments of the judges to justify the decision?

Basically, tattooing is a dangerous practice, exactly as permanent make up and needs a medical license. Tattooing is not something you need on a daily basis, but people make a living from that and, one day, the police comes in and forbid you to work. That is the way it is.

What support did you get from professional tattooers in Japan?

We received money through our organisation Save Tattooing in Japan to keep on fighting and lead the movement. Some tattooers are bringing us their support because they consider that it is also their problem. Some, on the opposite are not, and think we should not bring light to that matter and are against this trial. There are very contrasted appreciations.

What do you mean?

There are two categories of tattooers. Those who work sometimes close to the criminal world, the yakuza; they can belong to families of tattooers which follow the tradition. These people represent the old style type of tattooers. And then there are other people, the ones who came after or quit the yakuza environment.

Some tattooers disagree with your intervention,

they would have preferred to stay in the grey zone which existed and allowed them to continue their work. How do you feel about that?

It's a shame that we can't work together and that we can't figure out the same goal. But traditional tattooers are sometimes part of yakuza families and their customers are mainly coming from these yakuza groups. In this context, it is very complicated to work with these tattooers and the new generation prefers to step aside. It's true that it would be very useful if a renowned tattooer would send a supporting message, it could reach not only Japan but

the whole world. But in Japan, the association between irezumi and the criminal world still exists. It is then necessary, according to me, to draw a clear distinction between generations.

Is the future of tattooing in Japan at this cost?

I'd like to change the image of tattooing in Japan. I'd like it to be clearer, more transparent, and this goes along with the 'structurisation' of a system with norms and the constitution of an association for tattooers of the new generation to join. I don't deny tradition, nor traditional tattooers, they are professionals. But it seems important to realise that we have the possibility to choose our way. And to me, it is decisive to create an association which doesn't have any connection with the yakuza world.

What's coming next in the procedure?

We are preparing with our lawyers our appeal file. It is our new fight. The last judgment will be given before the end of 2018.

The Ministry of Health said last march that the topic of tattooing needed more discussions, where are they now?

For now, they are nonexistent. But we need to continue our work on hygiene norms. We already organised symposiums, and a lot of tattooers came. But for now, nothing is realised.

Is there a regulation you'd like to inspire from for Japan?

France. The french system inspires me because there are a certain amount of compulsory hours of training along with a declaration at the prefecture. Asking for a license is maybe a bit early, but we could start from there before moving to a more specific system for Japan.

How do you do financially speaking?

Until now it's thanks to this association that we could run the procedure. Now, it is difficult to keep on like this with what we have. We need new incomes. The procedure for the appeal costs more money and we may build a crowd funding campaign and ask for the participation of the whole world. ▣



Zolie Carter

MENTALL
★ ★ ★



PAIN IS POWER

Laurence Shahlaei is a tattooed strength athlete with a formidable reputation. The Warrior to his adversaries, Big Loz to his friends, Laurence is one of the greatest strength athletes to ever wrestle an Atlas Stone off the ground. He is currently UK's Strongest Man, former Europe's Strongest Man and multiple times World's Strongest Man Finalist as well as holding the world record in the Super Yoke. Matt Haddon-Reichardt took a train to Swindon to meet up with Big Loz and discuss big lifts, tattoos and how breaking through the pain barrier is the key to success

I started competing in Strongman back in 2005 and I've always been a huge fan of the sport," explains Loz as he sips on a bottle of water his massive bulk crammed into an easy chair. "I've always been very sporty and competed at school level in many sports from athletics, to Kung Fu and rugby but I never joined a gym until 2004."

What gave him the inspiration to pick up a dumb bell and begin his career in strength athletics was the Christmas coverage of the 2004 World's Strongest Man.

"I was just watching it on the telly and I thought that I could give that a go. That's basically how it all started. I have always been very naturally strong. I was a very strong rugby player and I was the strongest kid at my school but until the end of 2004 I'd never been

a member of a gym or done any serious training."

"When I decided to take up Strongman I was coaching table tennis which wasn't what I was really built for," laughs Loz. "I was a County level player and I used to really enjoy coaching but Strongman definitely suits my natural abilities better."

"If I do anything I always want to excel in it. When I was younger I was a British Champion at Kung Fu and played rugby for the South West and competed at a high level in athletics at throwing events. I don't know why but for some reason I'm very competitive and always want to be the best I can possibly be."

That absolute determination to succeed has seen Big Loz rise through the ranks of Strongman winning tournaments and setting records. Perhaps his



WHO IS THE STRONGEST MAN WHO HAS EVER LIVED?

"In my opinion the best strongman ever is Zydrunas Savickas," is Loz's matter of fact answer to a question that plagues pub conversations, Facebook posts and Strongman forums. Loz continues in his appraisal, "it's not just because of what he has won but his longevity as well."

The facts are hard to dispute 4 times World's Strongest Man, 8 times winner of the Arnold Strongman Classic, 3 times Europe's Strongest Man, 14 times Lithuania's Strongest Man and the current world record holder in the log lift, Savickas is 42 and still winning competitions at both open and senior levels.

"It's not just the wins its the number of records he's held and he has come back time and time again after injury to dominate the sport and achieve at the highest level."

Much like Laurence, Zydrunas is a humble guy who lets his lifts do the talking. Like Laurence he is also tattooed, having a small eagle on his back. I contacted Zydrunas to ask him about tattooing, pain and Strongman. His answer was short and simple.

"This is small and old tattoo. I will do new tattoo, but its takes time."

in a car park in front of a few dozen people. Now we are performing at arenas in front of more than 10 thousand people."

The sports new found popularity has a lot to do with the athletes themselves, the weights they are lifting and the records being set. Today's strongmen are doing for reps the kinds of weights guys in the 1980's were doing for maximums. Competing at such a high level puts a huge amount of pressure on the athletes but for Laurence it's

most famous victory is taking the crown off Icelandic giant Hafþór Júlíus Björnsson, famous for playing The Mountain in hit TV show Game of Thrones, at the 2016 Europe's Strongest Man tournament. A career defining performance from Loz saw him setting a world record in the car carry and beating Thor at his favourite event, the Atlas Stones, to push the Hollywood star into 2nd place.

Laurence has been winning competitions during an era of strongman where the sport has achieved unparalleled popularity.

"At my first international competition I was competing

a cathartic process.

"Strongman is a way of letting off some steam. For me it's about channelling my anger and bringing something positive from it. I'd rather take it out on a heavy lift than go and break something or do something stupid," laughs Loz.

It's hard to imagine Laurence getting angry. Despite his huge bulk and bear like appearance he comes across as a very mellow, chilled out guy.

"When I'm competing I'm able to flick a switch and perform. I can be laughing a joking behind the scenes but when it's time to do what needs to be done I shift mentally into a different zone."

For the sport of Strongman psychology plays as big a part in generating success as physiology. The ability to lift heavy weights may be bound to the body but the belief that records can be broken and the unliftable lifted, comes from the mind. One of the biggest challenges to Laurence and his comrades in strength is the ability to control pain.

"What separates a guy who thinks he's strong to a really good strongman is their pain threshold. It's not about the events where you have to lift a massive weight once, it's the events where you have to carry a weight a distance or hold weight for a long time. One rep is easy but as soon as you start piling the reps on top of each other your lungs quickly start burning, your muscles start burning; it's a horrible, horrible pain where your body is telling you to stop. The good guys can battle through that pain and dominate it; they keep going when others would have crumbled. It doesn't matter how strong you think you are physically; if the mentality doesn't back it up you will



never succeed at Strongman.”

It is not only the pain of competition that strength athletes have to dominate. Lifting such huge masses poses a real risk to the body and rarely does a competition go by where an athlete does not withdraw with an injury.

“I’ve had some serious injuries that have been well documented”, Laurence nonchalantly explains making light of torn muscles, ripped tendons and snapped ligaments, “you quickly learn the difference between pain that needs to be endured to improve as an athlete and pain that indicates something is seriously wrong.”

There are many times when Laurence could have quit the sport. One major injury too many pushing him to throw in the towel and opt for a less painful existence; but like any true champion he pulled himself out of his slump and worked hard to heal his body and fortify his mind.

“When you are coming back from a big injury and particularly when you are lifting a weight or doing an event where you sustained that injury, doubt creeps into your mind. You have to overcome that and you do that by looking at why you got injured and how you can avoid that again. It’s about technique, mobility, hydration and nutrition. For some people it just beats them; I’ve seen more than one guy not come back from a bad injury. That’s as much mental as it is physical.”

“As an athlete you have to push yourself to the limit. You have to navigate the edge of what is physically possible otherwise you will get beat.”

Which brings us onto the subject of tattooing; Laurence has a large tribal design inked into the skin of his

left shoulder. Tattoos hurt and big tattoos hurt for a sustained period of time. Anyone wanting to get large areas of skin covered by a tattoo has to sit for hours enduring the pain of needles being repeatedly driven in and out of the skin. The psychological mindset for the tattoo subject is similar to that of strength athletes; no pain no gain.

“I’ve just got the one tattoo at the minute but I want to get more. I got my shoulder tattoo done at Mantra Tattoo Studio Cheltenham which is a great studio with a cool bunch of guys. I’m weighing up where to go for my next one and a lot of people have offered to do tattoos for me but to be honest with so many great tattooists out there at the moment its tough to decide. I need to find space in my schedule to do some research and find an artist who I can really work with.”

Much like his training Big Loz takes his body art seriously. “I want to get a sleeve of motivational quotes on my arm but it’s just finding the time, what with training and competing and everything else. I really want to get some motivational quotes on me as it’s those kinds of things that have helped me get through injuries and the tough times. Words have power and they change how we think. How we think effects what we can achieve so my next tattoo is

TITLES:

- UK's Strongest Man 2017
- 9x WSM competitor
- Europe's Strongest Man 2016
- Ultimate Strongman World Champion 2016
- 2 times Britain's Strongest Man
- Multiple Strongman Champions League Stage Winner
- Multiple Giants Live Winner
- British Powerlifting Champion



Copyright Adam James

WORLD RECORDS:

Farmers Walk [Guinness World Record - 150kg in each hand over 20 metres in 6.73 seconds]

Frame Carry 450kg over 20 metres in 10.5 seconds

Car Walk 460kg over 20 metres in 10.52 seconds

Yoke 450kg over 20 metres in 12 seconds [specific to a grass track. Currently holds every/multiple records in the Yoke]

British Cross Federation RAW Powerlifting total - 960kg

British squat record - RAW with wraps 380kg

British squat record - RAW with sleeved 365kg

going to be part of cycle of self belief, positive action and goal actualisation.”

As anyone with a good tattoo will tell you aftercare is key to ensuring the artwork heals well and stands the test of time. Flipping tyres, picking up giant logs and hefting round boulders is not conducive to skin healing.

“You couldn’t get tattooed then go and train and compete; particularly not your arms. The wraps we have to use, the chalk we put on our hands to dry them out to improve grip and the rubbing and abrasion of the equipment we lift would just ruin a new tattoo. The Atlas Stones are the worst; they scar your arms up horribly and would rip a new tattoo to pieces. I’m hoping during down time in the off season to look into getting some more work done.”

Laurence’s tribal tattoo took 6 hours of blood, sweat and pain but which is more painful tattooing or Strongman?

“Strongman,” Loz says with a smile, “I didn’t mind the pain of a tattoo, probably because I have a high pain threshold. About 4 hours in the tattoo began to hurt, when the shading was being done, my arm was a little swollen that was the most uncomfortable part. But to be honest I’m a bit weird and like pain anyway so I quite enjoyed getting tattooed,” he laughs swigging on his water.

I check my watch; we’ve been talking for an hour and my train is due soon. I finish off by asking him what would



Zoie Carter

be his crowning achievement to top all his successes.

“My ultimate goal is to Win World’s Strongest Man. I’m focussed over the next couple of years on achieving that goal. I can’t see me still competing into my 40’s, I want to move on and do other things. My goal is to win World’s Strongest Man within the next few years and retire on top.”

With his humility, humour, fortitude and strength Laurence’s goal is well within reach. □

Mondial Tatouage

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A 10
R 11
S 11

2018

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An Illustrated Death

Skeletons come to life and contemplate their existence in the work of Ilja Hummel, a tattooist with a keen eye for the macabre and the historical...

@iljahummel

Using a distinctive technique of hatching in his practice, Hummel creates arresting tattoos as though they have been ripped straight from the pages of old occult books and 16th-century anatomical atlases. It is difficult to not see inspiration from the publication *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the Fabric of the Human Body) by Andreas Vesalius, who re-configured post mortem anatomy by illustrating flayed bodies and human skeletons in various states of self-contemplation and everyday activity. Like the work of Vesalius, Hummel's hand highlights that there is a beauty in death, an acknowledgement that even after death life can still be found.

Your tattoos often reference the occult, how did you become fascinated with this subject matter?

It's hard to nail a point or situation; I have been fascinated with stuff like this as long as I can remember. It started with 60s Hammer Horror Movies and Italian Giallos as a teenager and later discovering artworks related to the subject of death, such as *Danse Macabre* (Dance of Death) and *Vanitas* paintings.

What was the turning point that led you to using this type of imagery in your tattooing practice?

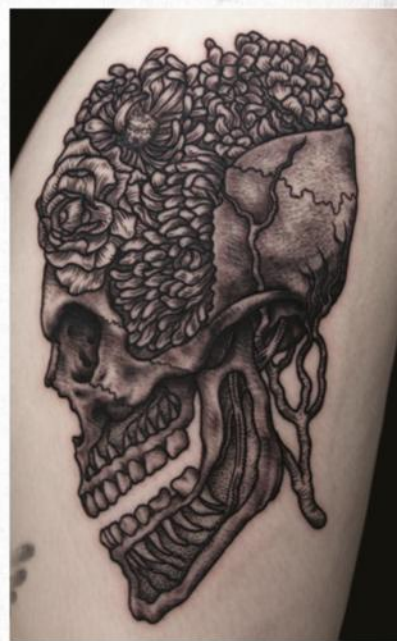
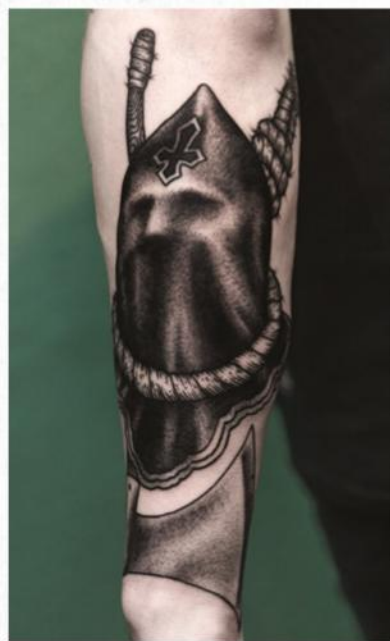
Being tattooed since the mid 80s and tattooing since the mid 90s I have seen tattooing develop from an under-



ground art form to a mainstream practice. I guess using this kind of imagery was, and still is, an attempt to get back some kind of roughness and attitude into the whole thing. It's also about trying to find some sort of European identity in tattooing by using old European imagery.

Do you think people are fascinated with this type of historical imagery as they are now fed up with the constant bombardment of contemporary images and products?

I guess I'm not the only person feeling like this, I think a lot of people are fed up with the onslaught of contemporary images. I mean you only have to now look down at



I think a lot of people are fed up with the onslaught of contemporary images.

your phone to be hit with a barrage of advertising; images of what you should have or should be buying. I think this does crossover into tattooing in some ways. For example a lot of people feel that the American traditional tattoo is kind of artificial now (at least in Europe and in the 2010s). It does not fit their empirical world, their life. So recollecting and reinterpreting old European art as a source for tattooing seems obvious to counter these ideas.

Are your works inspired by the history of painting?

Definitely! Having studied art history for a couple of semesters I found late medieval and early renaissance art really inspiring and helpful developing some sort of a style. For example Lucas Cranach the Elder and Albrecht Dürer for their woodcuts and graphic work, and Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Hieronymus Bosch for their overall perception of perspective and painting in general, to name a few.

How does the texture of the skin differ from the texture of the canvas?

Skin is a living thing. It moves, wraps, changes, and ages. Therefore it doesn't have the longevity of canvas. Lines soften and lose their sharpness through the years. Black ink in tattooing is everything but getting that 'real black' is the dream, as the ink is under and not physically on your skin. Since there's no way to have an influence on this—it's simply the course of nature—you have to work with what you've got. You've got to make sure to leave enough space between the lines and keep a proper balance between tattooed areas and bare skin to create contrast and a long-lasting intensity.

What can be achieved in a tattoo that can't be achieved by a painter?

A connection. A tattoo offers or even enforces a connection between the person wearing it, the tattooist, and the tattoo itself. What I'm trying to say is, a tattoo is linked way more to its owner than any painting can ever be. Paintings can be stored away, lent out or simply be sold. The tattoo in contrast has an extraordinary connection to its owner as one of its main defining characteristics.

You've got to make sure to leave enough space between the lines and keep a proper balance between tattooed areas and bare skin



through the years that offer a lot of different references or at least hint at what I should be researching further.

Your subject matter often examines the beauty of death, what attracts you to working around this subject matter?

Maybe a philosophical reason, sort of a substitute for the lost religion in our sophisticated times. I cannot put a finger on the exact reason but death, especially in art, has always had a large impact on me. People have always told me, even back in the 90s when I was tattooing mainly neo-traditional style tattoos, there are always two characteristic features in my tattoos: skulls in any form and a striking amount of black ink.

Can death be beautiful?

For sure! Looking at old European ossuaries you can see that there's been an aesthetic approach to dealing with death for quite a while. In looking at contemporary art you've only got to look at the photographic work of Joel-Peter Witkin to see how the beauty of death has been expressed in a poetic, breathtaking way.

What tattooists do you particularly admire?

It's gotta be Alexander Grim (@alexandergrim) for his overall tattooing that bears a striking influence from renaissance art. And Pietro Sedda (@pietrosedda) for his variety of styles, textures, ideas, and concepts.

I have noticed that in some pieces you have featured anatomically correct organs and skeletons. There is a growing popularity for people getting anatomical tattoos, highlighted by the recent published book *The Anatomical Tattoo* by Emily Evans, why do you think people are so drawn to getting them?

It's really hard to say but maybe getting these sorts of tattoos is about portraying your body from inside to out, so that you can revise and reconsider what your about physically and mentally, a way of exploring the concept of what a body is and can be. Or, it could be as simple as an inexplicable affection to these sorts of images; a way of reconfiguring what human anatomy can look like. I especially think you can see this sort of thing happening when anatomical tattoos are merged with designs of machinery and monstrous like features.

Many of your tattoos feature tarot cards, these being tools of divination. Looking back to your past, what tattoo has pushed you to your absolute limit?

After more than 20 years of tattooing it's almost impossible to put a finger on that tough tattoo. There are doz-

In many of your tattoos you use hatching to create shadow, why is this an effective way of creating texture?

The hatching brings—at least for me—the roughness, the overall feel I am looking for. Sometimes I might use other techniques like dotting or whip shading if it suits the tattoo style and context better.

What are the pros and cons in using this style of shadowing?

With hatching you only get a certain amount of depth. When the lines get too dense or even crossed—like in a lot of the old woodcuts and engravings—they will disappear in a black blur through time.

Using this hatching method has created a distinctive aesthetic to your tattoos, with many of them echoing the look of historical illustrations. What sources do you get inspired from?

You named it! Historical illustrations from science books, vintage anatomical drawings, old woodcuts, engravings, and books about the history of art are all great inspirations for my tattooing practice. Although, I try not to use the web too much. I bought quite a lot of books about art



ens of reasons that can make it hard or when you have to push yourself to the limit. Be it the fact that you took an appointment for a design you do not like or do not understand, be it the customer having an idea he or she is not able to explain exactly. Or be it the fact that the customer doesn't understand some basics about tattoos and you have to discuss every little part of the tattooing process. At the moment I am pretty lucky with my customers and the stuff they want me to tattoo!

Now looking at the present, what subject matter is currently inspiring you? How have you created tattoos from this inspiration?

As I've mentioned I'm really fascinated by Danse Macabre (Dance of Death), and I think I'm attracted to this because its subject matter revolves around the idea of human universality i.e. we are all going to die at some point. Also, I'm currently really captivated by old anatomical

Looking at old European ossuaries you can see that theres been an aesthetic approach to dealing with death for quite a while

illustrations, especially the small mistakes the illustrator has made or the simplifications that were necessary due to vintage publication techniques (i.e. woodcut, engraving).

Looking to the future, what tattoo work do you hope to create?

I definitely would like to explore more vintage anatomical illustrations, the older the better! Signs at the moment are good, I'm finding customers who are really into my personal interests, so it's great that I'm tattooing what I'm really inspired by. I'm not the most sociable person in the world but I do want to broaden my tattooing horizons by attending a few more conventions this year and doing a couple of good guest spots in some awesome shops. ▣

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REBEL INC.

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing, artists doing something different with their inks. This month he meets Natalie Nox from Doctor Pepper Tattoo in Athens

 natalienox  Nat.NoX

Tattooing is perhaps one of the most road-friendly lifestyles out there. This is both a blessing and a curse—travelling can be expensive, after all, and most artists who live on the road certainly aren't doing it for financial gain, making just enough to keep them in planes and fast food and often being out of pocket.

But it's not always about the money, as Natalie Nox tells me. "It's more about the experience and knowledge that you get. Doing guest spots or tattoo conventions opens new horizons and that's a huge part of my development as an artist." It's not just the other artists you meet along the way, either - sharing new ways of doing things, different techniques or styles that can be applied to your own art.

No, it's more than that. "Traveling helps me think outside the box, to capture different stuff than what I would in the studio. I have been taking a lot of pics of random stuff all around the world. Power lines, buildings, birds. The environment around you gives the best information on how to create something that maybe looks busy but still has a reason and a beauty behind it."

Born in the Ukraine, Natalie relocated to Greece very early in life, so transience is perhaps something that comes naturally to her. It has certainly shaped her own style massively, Natalie always looking to other art and artists for fresh inspiration.

"I was always fascinated by more expressive art. Bue-

**SHARING NEW WAYS
OF DOING THINGS,
DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES
OR STYLES THAT CAN
BE APPLIED TO YOUR
OWN ART**









THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND YOU GIVES THE BEST INFORMATION ON HOW TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT MAYBE LOOKS BUSY BUT STILL HAS A REASON AND A BEAUTY BEHIND IT

I really enjoyed more minimalist styles of tattooing but over time my style has developed into a more expressive, abstract style. Yet I still try to keep the same minimalist principles as my biggest rule is 'less is more'. I want everything to have a reason, to flow with the body, not just throwing lines on top of other lines."

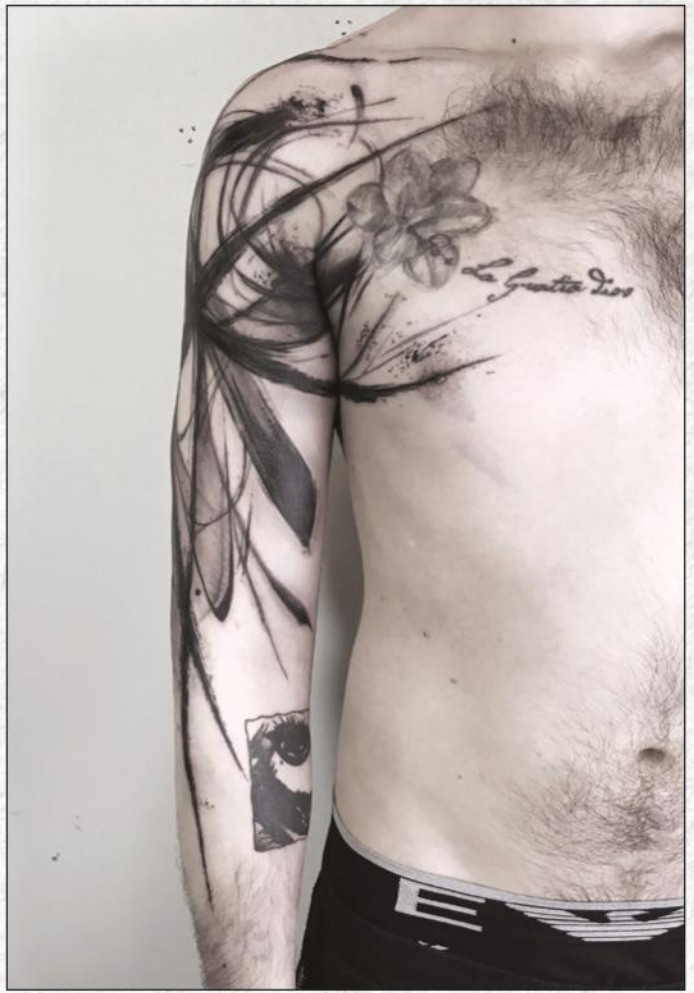
Natalie believes preparation to be the key, here, as well as having forged a good working relationship with the client. "It's very important for the artist to be allowed freedom, to have gained trust to create something individual and fitting for each client. Especially within abstract art. It is very easy for a tattoo to turn out too heavy and scratchy if you have to follow a client's direct order on every dot. Sitting with the client and discussing the design and exchanging ideas beforehand, therefore, is crucial to creating the best tattoo."

For Natalie, this is particularly important as her tattooing process is incredibly intimate, even by tattooing's standards. "I usually freehand most of my work directly onto the body with markers and brushes," she explains. "This way, the abstract effects—the splashes or brushstrokes—look natural and sometimes not perfect, but that's what makes it unique. In the past, I used stock images of splashes or brushstrokes but it wasn't the same, it

na Vista, in Germany, were some of the first tattooists that I was looking up - my use of 'splashes' was inspired by them. France is a country with many amazing artists in this particular style—Lionel, Niko Inko and more—abstract tattooing was already popular there way before the rest of Europe. I have also become a big fan of Chenjie in China and Lee Stewart in the UK."

Natalie draws inspiration from all kinds of tattoos and tattoo artists, not just the more abstract. "Artists inspire me for different reasons," she tells me, "like creativity, technique, flow." In fact, one of the most striking things about her work, I feel, is how clean it is. Some abstract tattoos can appear messy, a little too scratchy perhaps, and yet Natalie seems to avoid this completely, incorporating her abstract elements in quite a minimalist way.

"I'm glad you can see that in my art. In the beginning,



IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR THE ARTIST TO BE ALLOWED FREEDOM, TO HAVE GAINED TRUST TO CREATE SOMETHING INDIVIDUAL AND FITTING FOR EACH CLIENT

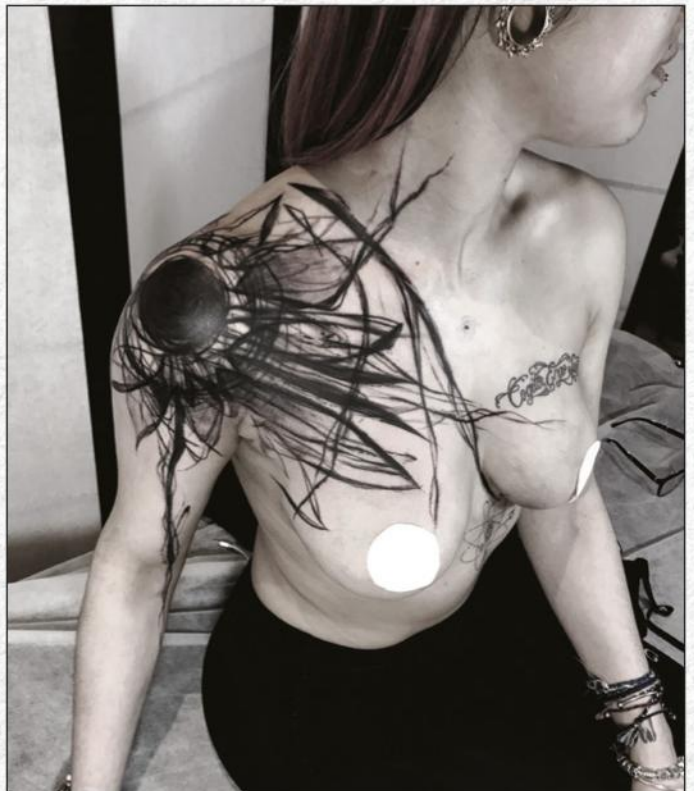
looked 'forced perfect' in a way, unnatural. Doing it naturally, you get to see how different strokes and splashes work with the shape, curves and body flow of each individual, which is really interesting."

Once that's done, Natalie takes a photo and completes the base of the design on her iPad so she can show it to the client. At that stage, she can make any last-minute amendments, ensuring both the artist and client are happy.

This process may be integral to everything she does within tattooing, yet Natalie doesn't let it curtail her in any way or tie her down to one style or way of doing things. On the contrary, she is keen to experiment further with her art with plans in the very near future to collaborate.

Again, travel plays a big role.

"I will be traveling a lot through Europe and Asia, maybe Canada. I really want to develop my style into something close to my ideal art, even mixing styles together by collaborating with other artists."



It's an idea that's come about through talking with Benjamin Laukis, Natalie's partner and an incredibly talented artist in his own right.

"His take on realism mixing with my chaotic abstract, I think, will create some nice and interesting results," she tells me and I don't doubt it for a second. ▣



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Project X

Picture a bodysuit made up entirely of small Xs repeated tens of thousands of times. 40,000 times, to be exact. Who would choose such a design and, more importantly, why would they want to adorn their entire body with such a simple, seemingly arbitrary symbol? Enter Alfredo Meschi. The Italian artist [yes, art-ivist] is the proud owner of said bodysuit, a very permanent performance art piece he has dubbed Project X

www.alfredomeschi.com  [alfredomeschix](https://www.instagram.com/alfredomeschix)

Words: Barbara Pavone



Alfredo Meschi is striking. If the cattle tag in his ear doesn't catch your attention, the unique tattoo covering his body from head to toe sure will.

Since making it his mission to stand up for animals and fight for their rights, Meschi has embraced his role as an "anti-speciesist activist" wholeheartedly and has chosen to convey his powerful message with a little, actually, a lot of help from ink.

"I am 50 years old and I believe that the moral rectitude of my grandfather Alfredo and his sense of justice gave me a great impulse to become an activist," he explains. "I remember mail bombing against eco crimes and my first protest in front of a McDonald's when I was a teenager. It was too long ago," he laughs.

"I am an anti-speciesist and all of the struggles for social and environmental justice mean a lot to me," he continues, but it's impossible to deny that animal rights hold a special place in his heart. As he points out, "we are all animals and fighting for animal rights means also fighting for human animals' rights. If we don't regain our empathy towards non-human animals, then there won't be any chance of survival for us, for them, or even for the planet."

Given his passion, you may be surprised to learn that Meschi actually comes from a family of fishermen and

What Is Artivism?

"The activist [artist + activist] uses her artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression — by any medium necessary," writes author, filmmaker and professor MK Asante in *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*. "The activist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination.

The activist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation."

hunters. "My dad was a white hunter in East Africa and that's where he used to take me hunting at the beginning of the '70s," he recalls. "Meanwhile, my uncle won the Italian Underwater Fishing Championship and taught me underwater fishing when I was 10 years old. They passed away before my vegan activism, but I think that it would have been difficult to make them understand my vision," he admits.

Unveiling Project X

For his latest artivism project, dubbed Project X, Meschi decided to cover his body with 40,000 X tattoos symbolizing the 40,000 animals slaughtered by humans every second. "It's a checkmark, a symbol that we use to count something off and non-human animals nowadays are treated as mere disposable things," he declares.

In addition to that shocking statistic, Meschi was also inspired by *Poner el cuerpo: sacar la voz* — meaning "to show one's body, to raise one's voice" in Spanish — a photography series shot by Mexican activist Édgar Olguín.

For the project, Olguín captured powerful images of men and women posing naked in various public spaces across Mexico City, their bodies painted with slogans, like 'It was the army' and '#IveHadEnough,' which con-



demned the killing of 43 student protesters in 2014.

“As I said before, anti-speciesism embraces all of the other social struggles and when I discovered the crime against those 43 innocent students in Mexico, I was really shocked,” remembers Meschi. “The use of body writing of the Mexican artists was, for me, a path to be followed.”

And so, even though Meschi didn’t have any tattoos before embarking on Project X, “not a single one, not even the ear piercings,” he decided to go for it. What’s more, “my wife supported me and that was enough to start without any hesitation.”

In order to turn his vision into reality, Meschi teamed up with Stefano Cabula, a talented artist working at Red Island Tattoo Studio in his native Bosa, Italy. “Stefano is a friend of mine and although he is not vegan, he was willing to use vegan products for my tattoos and, more than anything, we share the same strong commitment to many social fights,” he says.

“Manuela Rujo also joined up with Stefano for the final part of my tattoos. I went to Red Island every morning and I stopped as we reached 40,000 Xs. It took about two months” and now that Project X is complete, Meschi reveals that he can’t help but “see those who are oppressed

The Rise Of Activism

Activism has seen a real surge in popularity and it might have something to do with America’s newest president. As Salon magazine noted in December 2016 in a piece titled *Activism Is a Fierce and Reflexive Response to the Election of Donald Trump*, “the reason for activism’s current pervasiveness should be clear: If activism stems from escalated passions, well, the form has found its beacon” in President Trump and is being moved forward by the “need to do something — anything, just to respond in some way.”

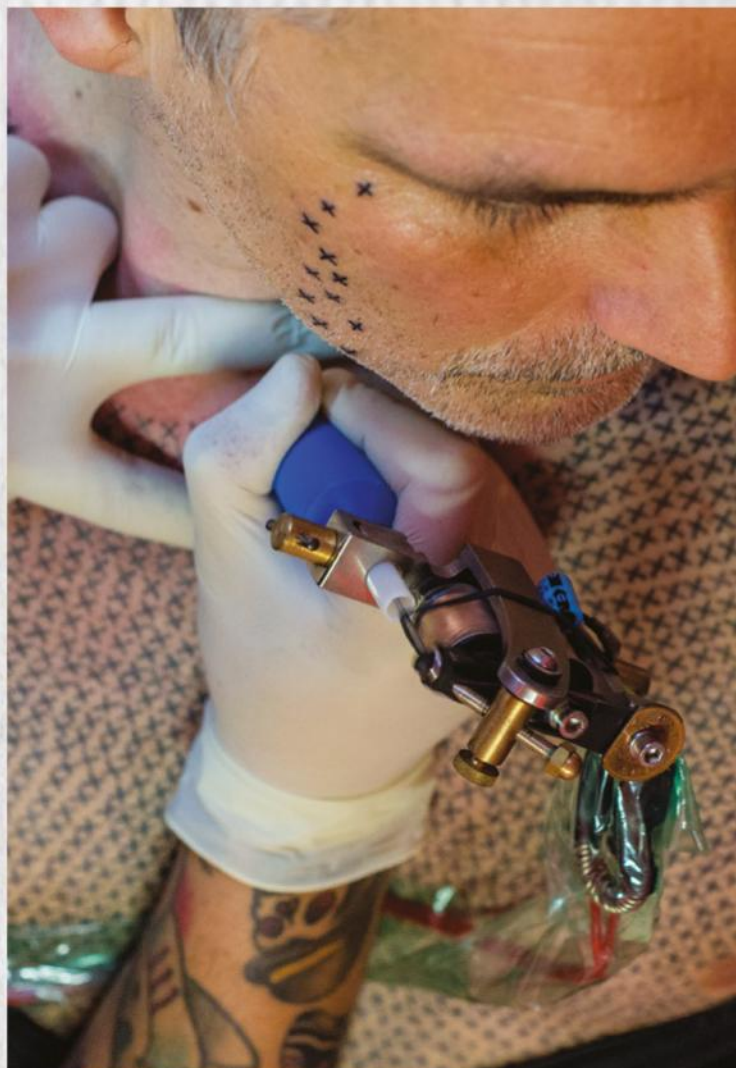
and the urgency of the fight” whenever he looks down at his body.

Inspiring Change

Given all this talk of activism, it seems like the perfect time to dig a little deeper and learn more about the term’s meaning and origin. As Meschi breaks it down, it’s a “linguistic blend of art and activism and it has its roots with the first steps in the scene of the global justice struggles that started with 1998’s Berlin protests.”

“It was only 30 years later, however, in 2008, that this syncretic neologism made its entrance into academic writing, all thanks to the works of American activist MK Asante who, instead of ‘by any means necessary’, used to say ‘by any medium necessary,’” he elaborates. “Anti-speciesist activism is inevitably nonviolent, as the end is the means.”

Hearing him speak so eloquently (and passionately) about the matter, another surprise comes in discovering that Meschi only became vegan three years ago. “Yes, it is true and before that I was a typical carnist,” he admits. “It is too difficult to summarise the experiences that during a 50-year period of time have led me to the ethical vegan choice, but, in chronological order, I can mention the mighty nature of Sardinia where I lived in recent years,



as well as the entry into my family of a non-human person, a female dog called Trudy. These were the experiences that gave the definitive impetus to my change.”

Despite the growing number of people embracing a vegetarian or vegan diet, however, many still find the mere notion of such a lifestyle change too difficult or simply unnecessary. But as Meschi argues, “There are so many books, websites, videos, shops, vegan people that can help us in the transition. Being vegan for me was very, very easy,” he adds. “And carnists in their life eat over 7,000 animals so, yes, it definitely makes a difference.”

Plus, there are small changes that anyone can make. “To pay attention to animals’ needs, their rights, their lives” is a step in the right direction. “The actions and the changes are too many to be mentioned, but what is important is that our commitment is 24/7, as is the current oppression that animals experience incessantly.” If nothing changes, he believes that, “simply put, we will become extinct. And rightly so.”

When it comes to the tattoo community, we’re already making strides. As Meschi points out, finding artists who choose to work with animal and plant-free products “was much more difficult in the past, but now, the most

Red Island Tattoo Studio

Located in the centre of Bosa, a small town on the island of Sardinia that boasts a population of just over 8,000, Red Island Tattoo Studio is home to two talented artists: Stefano Cabula and Manuela Rujo. After making a name for themselves in their native Italy, as well as at various conventions, the pair received a big dose of international attention last year thanks to their unique collaboration with Alfredo Meschi.

famous tattoo supply brands have already gone vegan.” That being said, he warns that “it is not always easy to understand if they are also following the international cruelty-free standards.”

Since its completion last year, Project X has grown and evolved into a collective activism project. Meschi’s new goal is to reach 2,202 Xs tattooed on different people around the globe. What is the significance of this particular number? “While the majority of my Xs represent fish and other sea animals, 2,022 is the number of land animals that are killed every second worldwide, just for our palate.”

As for Meschi himself, he has left Bosa, having instead “decided to live in a van in order to bring my activism where it is needed. Usually, when people see my tattoos and they approach me and we start talking, I get much respect. At the same time, on the web, my work happens to receive hundreds of insults in just one day.”

Even so, he’s as focused and driven as ever and is now “trying to increase the awareness of the massacre that occurs in our seas and oceans. Fish and other sea animals seem to be the most neglected in the animalist movement and I am preparing new artistic performances about this issue.” ▣

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Oil and Gasoline

Variety is the spice of life, they say. And yet, even within something as expressive as art, we see people curtail themselves to one particular style or way of doing things. I've seen it a lot within tattooing. Even relatively new artists seem in a rush to specialise, to find a style—realism, traditional, tribal—and stick with it. Yet, talk to anyone who spends any time in a tattoo studio and you'll find the day-to-day reality is very different to that: people coming through the door want variety, not a one-size-fits-all. And surely art itself demands the same

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Meet Sven Signe den Hartogh. He's an artist in the true sense of the word—someone who not only creates, but evolves too. Based on a farm just outside of Schiedam, The Netherlands, Sven takes on projects worldwide, working within a variety of mediums, not just styles: photography and film as well as painting and even poetry. “I feel this almost excessive need to create and, for me, every art-form is just another way of doing this,” he tells me. “To stick to only one medium would feel really weird. I need a variety in order to fully express myself.” As to which form of expression Sven chooses really depends upon the circumstances—he sees all art as interlinked. “Photography can inspire me in film, film can inspire my poetry and so forth. That I think is a really powerful way to grow and to learn new things in a rather unexpected way.”

It is this liberated approach to art and life which sets Sven apart. But it wasn't always like that. He talks of how difficult it was in his early life to engage with art, despite feeling a yearning for such, and he's still coming to terms with that. “Looking back, I have always been different but never found a way to truly express myself. Later on, I discovered that this feeling of being different and seeing things in a different way is really a blessing and is certainly necessary for what I create. I think it's pretty fair to say how everything that happens in life leads you to a certain path or place and I can honestly say that this goes for me as well. But that doesn't make it easier.”





I discovered that this feeling of being different and seeing things in a different way is really a blessing



Not that his childhood was horrible. Sven is quick to share some amazing memories, a genuine love for and connection with his family very evident. But there were more difficult times, especially in his younger years. “When I look back on those times, I still feel there is some suffering that I need to resolve in order to proceed.”

For Sven, a large part of the problem—and, indeed, barrier to his art—came from a dependency on prescription drugs. This is interesting as we often find drugs used as a catalyst or medium for creativity. And yet, for Sven, the most profound impact of drugs on his life has been negative—“an emotional cage,” he tells me. He was prescribed Ritalin as a child, after being diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), but never really considered how it was affecting him in a wid-



er sense. “Later, when I started experimenting with other drugs, I became aware of how what they were doing was similar to what I was doing to my body with Ritalin. That was the first time that it shifted from being a ‘medicine’ to being a ‘drug’.” Sven decided he didn’t want to rely on something artificial, to have such an inhibitive dependency that not only suppressed his ability to be creative, but also many of his most basic human emotions. “Quitting Ritalin was the best decision I ever made and it definitely gave me some interesting insights about the way we are supposed to fit in.” He still uses some drugs—“psychedelics” is what Sven calls them. But on the whole, his lifestyle and diet is pretty



Later when I started experimenting with other drugs I became aware of how what they were doing was similar to what I was doing to my body with Ritalin

clean. “To me it feels like there is so much beautiful stuff to be found and to be inspired by that I don’t necessarily need drugs to be creative. Ritalin never gave me that creative rush. In order to fully express yourself you have to let your emotions run free.”

We see this freedom very clearly within Sven’s art. No two things are the same. His photography is darker in tone, melancholic and more focused (a good example would be his most recent series, ‘Impermanence’), while his artwork is incredibly bright and chaotic. Again, this isn’t an intentional thing but rather just a natural way of interacting with whatever medium he works within. “All my creations just happen, just as life seems to just happen. So each piece is a reflection of something that I am going through: this may be melancholic or really vibrant, but it’s

never meaningless.”

Identity is a common theme and yet, for Sven, that doesn’t translate to individualism. Again, this is part of an evolving mindset. “It’s interesting because the word ‘identity’ and how that relates to ‘myself’ and ‘I’ has really changed over the course of a few months. I think we get really attached to the way we see ourselves and we project that as the truth. But as I see it, everything just happens. I’m a soul who uses this body as a vehicle and I project that as me, being Sven. But on the other hand, I’m you leading a different life. There is no separation between anyone, it’s just another embodiment of the whole. How this new way of looking at the word ‘identity’ reflects in my work, I think is soon to be discovered.”

It’s this evolving sense of community which educates the tattoos Sven has chosen





In order to fully express yourself you have to let your emotions run free

to get on his body. He admits that his earlier coverage was more about rebellion—having tattoos as opposed to being tattooed—but, again, that’s very much changed in recent years. “Now I’m more careful about the person, the atmosphere of the shop and the way the artist works. For a few years now I have been going exclusively to David Christ in Amsterdam, who has become a good friend. Tattooing is a collaboration between the giver and the receiver, an exchange of energy. It’s intimate, brutal and beautiful all at the same time. So you have to fully trust the artist and their art to be comfortable in this almost sacred ritual. I speak about what I would like

and I give David complete freedom to translate my thoughts into a design of his liking. This is really important for us in order to get the best result, because it’s not only my tattoo, it’s our process.”

As Sven continues to talk about his ink, I kind of get the feeling he’s not just talking about tattooing, but art in general. Or maybe what I think art should be—permanent, brave, ceremonial.

“At times it feels really primal to get tattooed,” he reflects. “But it’s beautiful.” ▣

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INSIDE THE STUDIO:

Noia

Noia is an interdisciplinary private tattoo studio in the heart of Berlin. Bringing together a collective of artists who combine different mediums and form a space for creativity and contemporary tattoo styles

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We get to the studio hot off the plane after an hour delay and are desperately in need of some friendly faces and caffeine. We are greeted by Lina who immediately offers us coffee and accepts the large punnet of strawberries my ‘two hours of sleep brain’ thought was the ideal visiting-your-studio gift.

The studio is in a red brick building on a bright leafy street and once inside, is housed in a large down stairs apartment with three rooms for tattooing a great communal kitchen and separate wash room. The space feels like a cozy gallery with lots of light and original artwork on the walls.

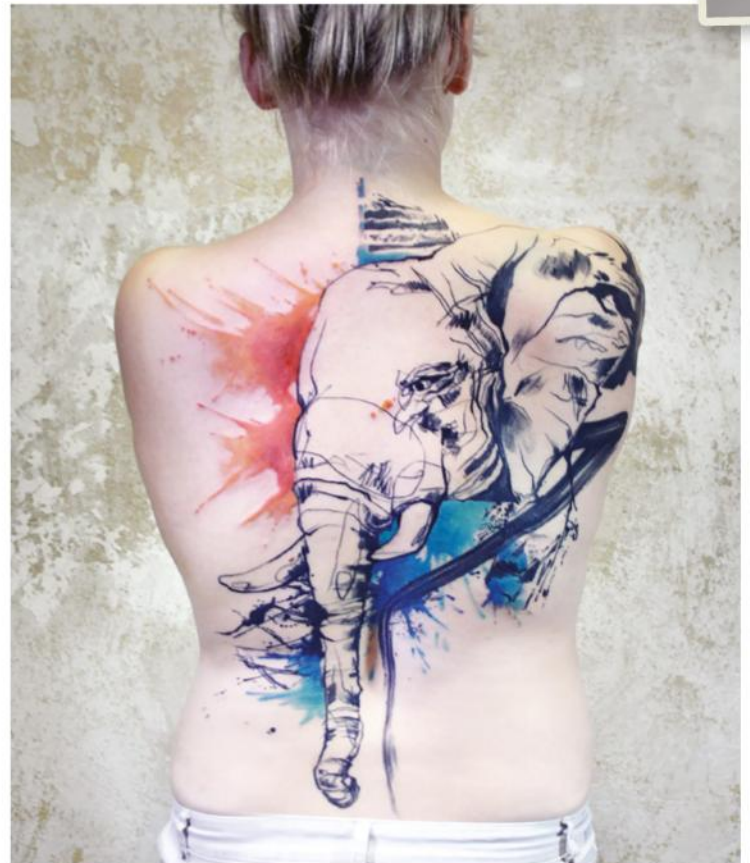
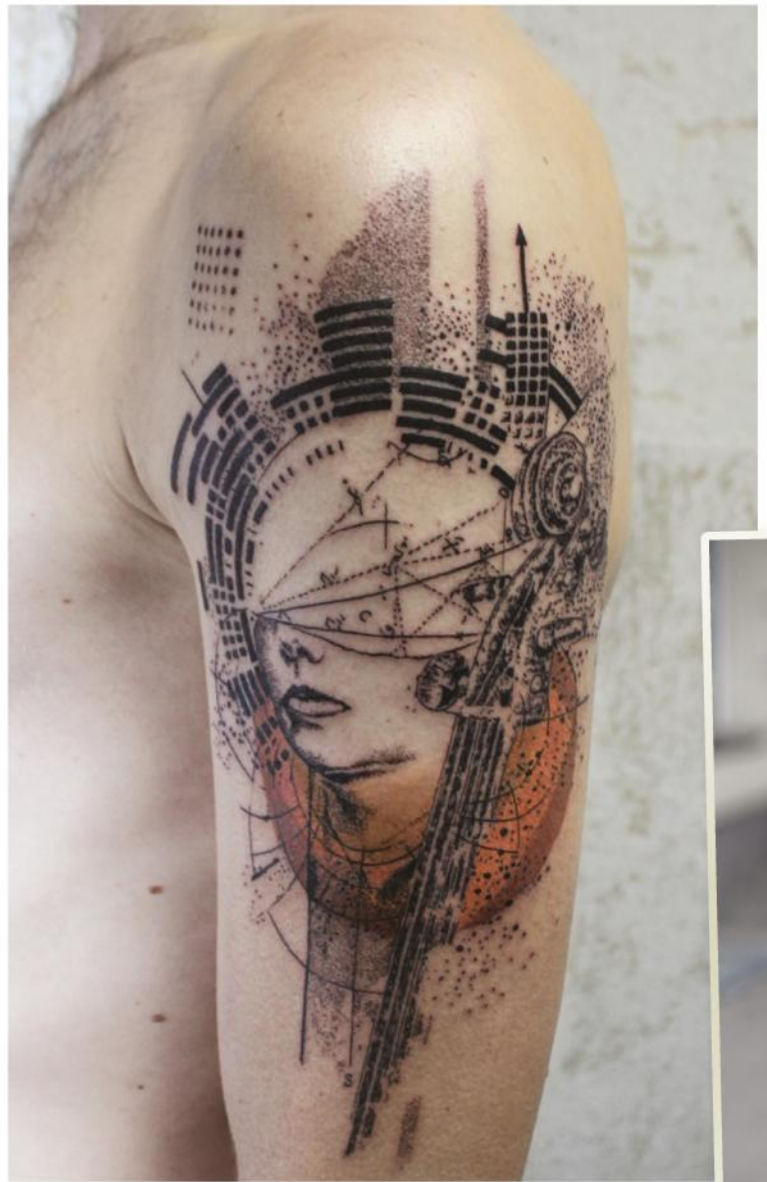
It is a typical Berlin space with white walls and big win-

dows. The studio is home to five artists and an apprentice. All artists have their own styles but they all fit together in a creative mix.

Founder Julia says of the name, “Noia is a name, a word that does not have a meaning. In Italian and in Spanish it means different things. I wanted something that sounded feminine and organic. I got my inspiration from the name of galaxies and stars from this direction, space was the inspiration and this is what developed from it.”

The studio was founded by Julia who moved to Berlin from Hanover eight years ago, she explains her artistic link to the city,

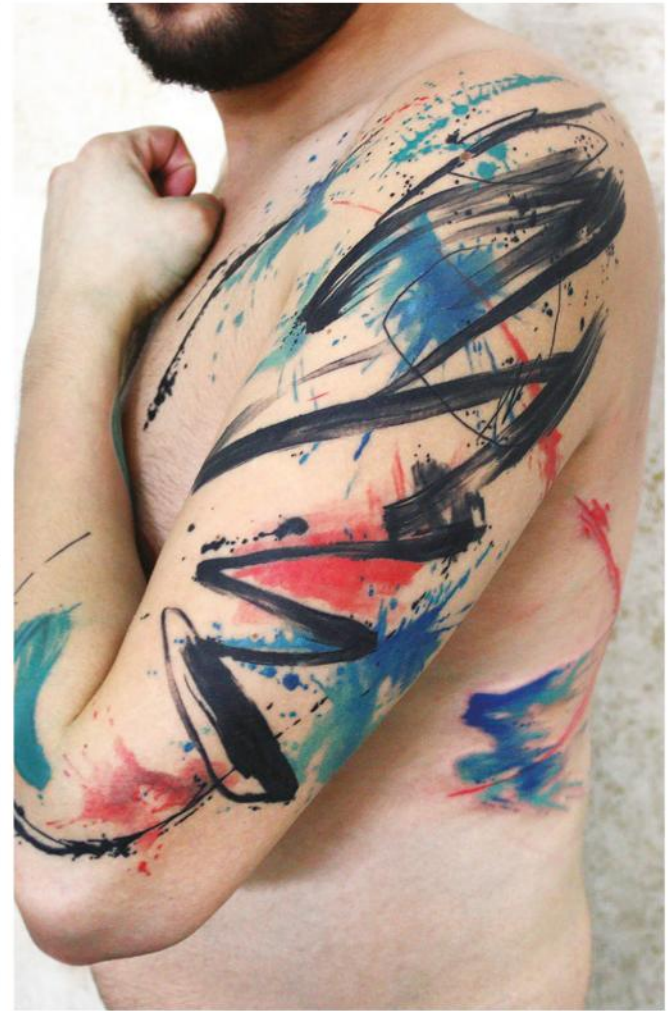
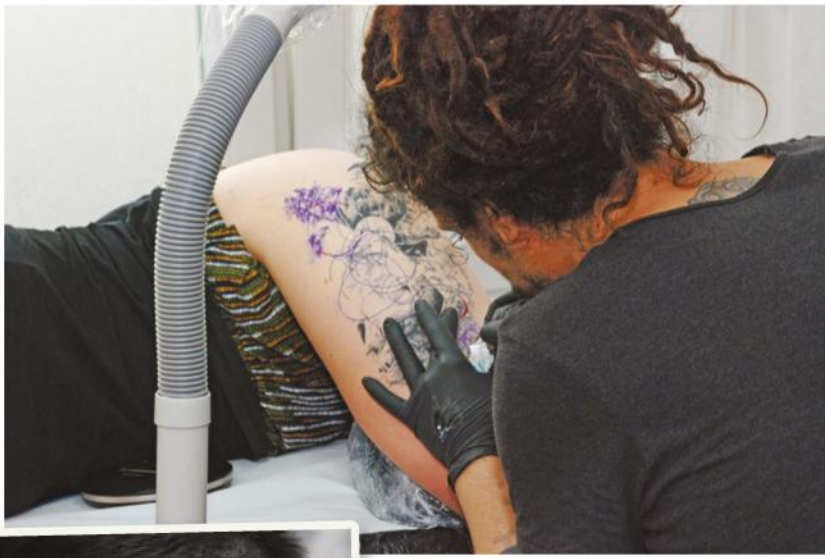
“I think as an artist you can develop much faster if you are surrounded by talented and inspiring people. Berlin



has its own vibe which has an influence on my work and as many people know this city has a wide music scene and I often go to concerts and collect inspirations there.”

Julia initially opened the space working with Martin Jahn and they both have their own work rooms in the shop, Julia talks about how she created the space, although at first she didn't exactly plan to open a tattoo studio,

“I worked in big studios before, like traditional tattoo studios with walk-in customers and I wanted to create a different place, just to be quiet and this is what developed



from it. The only thing I planned was the name. I wanted to give it a name which gives room for interpretation, it could be an art gallery or a tattoo studio that was the idea. We have five resident artists now and we also show their art work here.

We all have different routes like a few of them studied art and I studied Fashion design. We have different influences which makes it a nice mix I think.”

Martin adds: “When we first opened NOIA two years ago, there was just the two of us, Julia and me. Julia opened that atelier about six months before I moved in. Now we are a team of six including me and I’m really happy as we always have a really chilled work environment.”

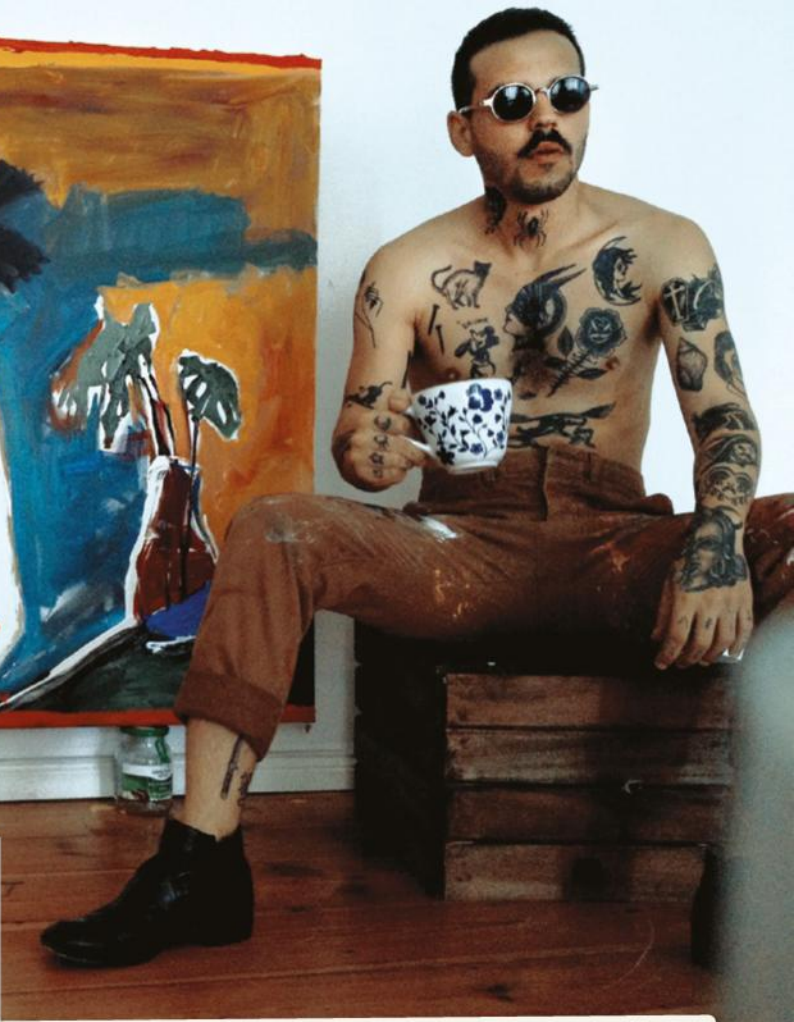
When we first arrive we also meet the apprentice Jana and say hi to Koit who is about to tattoo a great leg piece with two dogs. Chatting to the client they tell me that they actually shot a photo-shoot with the dogs in order to get the right images for the composition. Koit says of working at the studio,

“I work at NOIA studio in Berlin. It’s a collective of several international tattoo artists, we all have different and unique styles. The studio has a calm and warm atmosphere.”

When the studio was established Julia and Martin were joined by Lina and Koit,

RUNNING A BUSINESS

Julia reflects on the organisational side of the job, ‘Running the business is a bit of a challenge, I am happy to have Jana the apprentice now that helps me a little bit with organising, but I was thinking of maybe having a shop manager in the future to help with the organising and order the materials and do the work that is in the background because there is a lot to do.



both selected by Julia for their contemporary original styles. They were also joined later by Biel Carpenter and the three artists all share a large open work space. Julia explains this progression,

“I started working here like three years ago and then Martin was the second, I met him through a friend and then Koit came here for a guest spot and stayed. Then I found Lina’s work and asked her to join us. Biel joined the team last year and we also have Jana as an apprentice now. We have a good mix of styles, Lina and myself are the abstract artists and then we have some black work artists and Koit is like in-between so it is quite balanced I think, there are customers for everybody.”

‘It’s great to work with them since we have a lot of differences and are able to learn from each other. The studio is very relaxed, strives towards artistic freedom and development instead of just huge quantity of boring work. This system gives all of us a chance to keep developing our styles, provide a lot of our attention for each client, and have much more focus and energy for each tattoo we make. I much prefer to work this way rather than working on a fixed schedule.’ Lina says.

“I like working at Noia because it’s not just a tattoo studio, but a creative space that mixes different medias like painting, drawing, graphic design and also tattoos,” Biel adds.

Julia continues: “I think with five residents you have a good team, it’s not too big or too small and I like this. The studio developed, I did not really plan to have five artists or that we need a lot of work for them, it grew and social media helped this. It developed slowly and our guest artists helped increase our followers and people get to know about the studio. Our residents have a lot of work.”

THE FUTURE

In the future, there’s the idea to open a second space as a NOIA art studio and gallery.



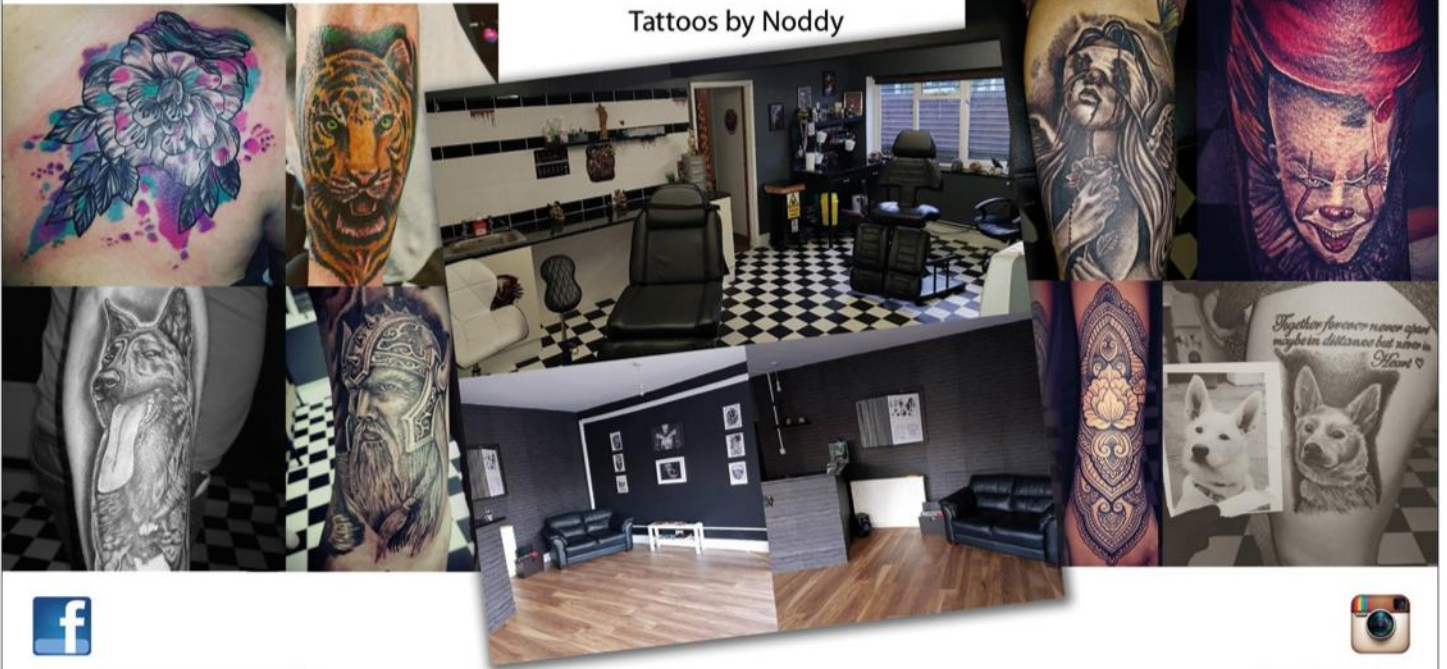
In the plan for NOIA will be to work with interesting guest artists. For the studio, it will always be important to work with artists (residents or guests) with an artistic background or a special, modern style. NOIA developed to a studio which creates space for new fields of tattooing. Also adding to their eclectic mix of styles artist has joined the team from December 2017.

With the quality and innovation of the designs, the hospitality of the artists and the chilled creative atmosphere NOIA is a great studio to visit for anyone looking for an original design in the artistic melting pot of contemporary culture that is Berlin. □

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Last year I introduced you to a client of mine, Dr. William Faux, or Bill as he is known by friends. Bill's story was one of inspiration and hope, with him finding his passion and career later in life, now a professor at Valdosta State University:



I RAISED MY RIGHT HAND AND IT MELTED AWAY INTO A GREY EMPTINESS. ABOUT AN HOUR LATER I COMPLETELY LOST MY VISION IN MY LEFT EYE

First I noticed walking became wildly exciting. To this day, I have come to appreciate walls, rails, and a friendly shoulder. I also find the occasional ‘Is he drunk?’ comment amusing especially when walking into a classroom to teach when I am having a ‘bad day.’ Next, the burning legs raged like bad sunburns. My right arm joined into that party as well. I began to notice that the people milling about the hotel became cognitively overwhelming. Additionally, words were becoming harder to reach. Since I was traveling to do several presentations, I figured this should be a hoot. But then the real fun started to happen—cramps. My right leg, right arm, stomach and even the muscles between my ribs became an alarm clock set for 4:30am and subsided usually by 10am. For quite a few hours I was curled up in a fetal position thinking, ‘Yup, I am pretty sure I have MS...’”

Bill walked us through the steps he took, and the life that has been created from taking a chance and chasing his passion of teaching. Another passion of Bill’s is music; the man can write a damn good prog rock song. Every tattoo session of his will usually en-

tail a listening session, during which he will educate me on how he recorded each track; all the while my mind swirls to visual memories of Sherman Hemsley dancing to Gentle Giant on the Dinah Shore Show, or when he had the band Nektar played on the Jeffersons as he danced through the room (all can be found on Youtube for your viewing pleasure).

I received a call last summer that I didn’t even really



realise was Bill until a bit into the conversation. Bill’s voice was quieter than normal; it was obvious he had been going through something. Bill was regretfully having to cancel his summer appointments because he had a pretty serious episode with the disease he is now living with, Multiple Sclerosis, or MS. MS is a neurological disease, and also a autoimmune



I DO MISS THE FULL VIBRANT REDS IN MY TATTOOED ROSES. MY BRAIN HAS ADJUSTED AND CREATES A MASHUP OF THE GREYNESS FROM ONE SIDE WITH THE FULL SPECTRUM FROM THE OTHER

disease. With this, your body's defences against disease malfunction and start assaulting your own cells. The immune system, whose job is to protect you, starts to work against your body and attacks your body's myelin, myelin being the protective substance that covers your nerves. Because of these attacks on the nerves, the symptoms of MS come in a wide range, all varying in severity. Bill had recently received the diagnosis that he was living with MS, a condition that over 2 million people are living with worldwide, and that his life is now and forever changed.

This winter I was finally able to see Bill, and finish up a tattoo we had started on the top of his shoulder. Just as every other session had been, I found myself inspired and encouraged by Bill's stories about the past six months, and how he views his future. Bill Faux had spent a huge part of his life entrenched in education, working to challenge his brain, and figure out how to use it to teach others. Now his brain and body were turning on him, after finally getting the footing he dreamed in the academic field. So many of us would use this as a roadblock for the continued progression of our lives, but for Bill Faux, MS is just another aspect his is living with. That to me is the most important thing about his story: Bill is living with MS. Bill is putting himself out there to break the stigma, and to show the world that we have to live each day on its own, one day at a time. Here's Bill's story, in his own words.

Bill says: "In my day job I read and write manuscripts daily. Some days can be a strain on the eyes. After cleaning my eyeglasses a few times in frustration to remove a smudge—an annoying smudge right in the middle of my left eye, I quickly realised it wasn't a smudge at all. I raised my right hand and it melted away into a grey emptiness. About an hour later I completely lost my vision in my left eye. Needless to say I was a bit freaked-out. Somehow I managed to calmly talk to my optometrist who urgently checked me for a torn retina. After a few tests nothing appeared to be wrong; it was deemed retrobulbar (fancy doctor talk for behind my eye). First, I am like, 'Great, I didn't tear my retina—whew,' but behind my eye? 'Hey, wait a minute; that's my brain!'

"The next stop was to my general practitioner who set up an MRI and neurology appointment. I was told I had optical neuritis. My optic nerve was inflamed and my vision would come back in roughly four weeks. They also told me they suspect multiple sclerosis but the MRI was not conclusive. My grey brain matter was fine. Officially my issue was deemed idiopathic (fancy doctor talk for they have no idea why my optic nerve died). The neurologist also forgot to tell me that my eyesight would only comeback by 50%. After four weeks I was not so much angry at the news; I was just bummed out. There was really nothing to do but wait for a sci-fi futuristic invention to



be developed (still waiting).

“The following slow return of poor vision led me to develop an understanding of some of the everyday things we take for granted. Our ability to see colour, vividness, brightness, peripheral cues, texts to read, depth perception, and people who appear out of nowhere all can change in an instant. I do miss the full vibrant reds in my tattooed roses. My brain has adjusted and creates a mashup of the greyness from one side with the full spectrum from the other. I also recognise that I still have the gift of sight—no matter how poor. I became used to a new normal. But new normals don’t stay normal for long.

“After a few years, the spectre of MS faded into the background but strange burning sensations infrequently hit my right leg. Crushing fatigue and weakness hit seemingly both episodic and at random. Also, I had numbness and an electrical feeling run-

ning over half of my body and tasting like a nine-volt battery. MS masks itself as a normal ageing process. I certainly was ageing—hitting my mid-forties and closing in on 50. I was overweight too which my doctors lovingly pointed out (hey, I like cheeseburgers, bourbon, and beer). But after reporting this new round of symptoms, the official neurological diagnosis in my record states, ‘The patient is hypersensitive and very anxious.’ Oh no-no-no: the patient is now very pissed off.

“My general practitioner knew I was genuinely upset and provided me with some sage advice that helps me cope day to day. He said, ‘If you have what you believe you have, we can’t stop it. We don’t have definitive evidence—trust me; I will monitor you. But don’t worry about what we can’t prevent. That’s not a way to live your life.’ So what’s a ‘hypochondriac’ to do? Exercise, lose weight, eat healthier, and ditch the neurologist. I did feel great and energetic. Also the angst immediately vanished. That was the new normal. The new normal lasted a few more years. Then blindness struck again. But I didn’t even consider it to be a problem. It was just a new change—a new-new normal.

“We are now ten years into this ‘short’ story. My zen master general practitioner was proactive and used his network to get me into a new neurologist that specialises in MS who saw me the next day. A new MRI was done asap and foolishly I left for a week long business trip. I didn’t realise MS treat-





IN MY OPINION, TATTOOS HURT WAY MORE THAN A SPINAL TAP. IF YOU EVER NEED TO GET ONE, DON'T HESITATE AND DON'T SWEAT IT

ments have changed dramatically in a decade. I just figured my vision would return again albeit more poorly in four weeks. I can't even tell if it ever improved—so no big deal there. But I knew I made a mistake when I arrived at the hotel after a day of travel and my body started to attack the motor functions of my brain.

"First I noticed walking became wildly exciting. To this day, I have come to appreciate walls, rails, and a friendly shoulder. I also find the occasional 'Is he drunk?' comment amusing especially when walking into a classroom to teach when I am having a 'bad day.' Next, the burning legs raged like bad sunburns. My right arm joined into that party as well. I began to notice that the people milling about the hotel became cognitively overwhelming. Additionally, words were becoming harder to reach. Since I was traveling to do several presentations, I figured this should be a hoot. But then the real fun started to happen—cramps. My right leg, right arm, stomach and even the muscles between my ribs became an alarm clock set for 4:30am and subsided usually by 10am. For quite a few hours I was curled up in a fetal position thinking, 'Yup, I



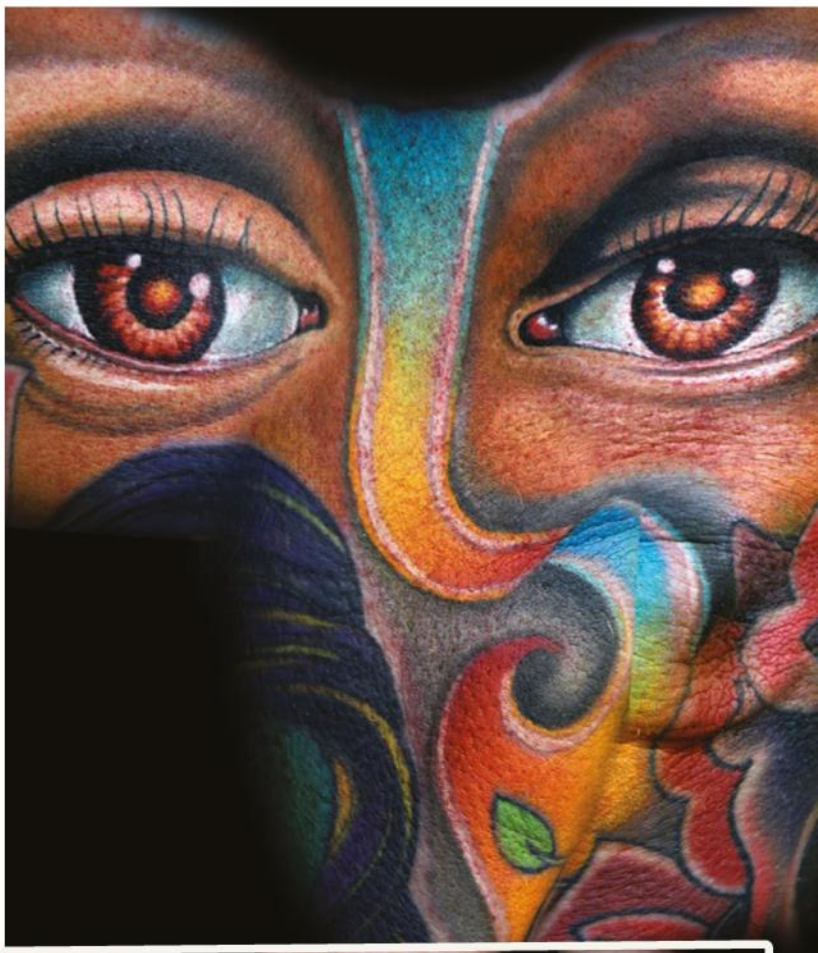
I GUESS IT WAS PROBABLY A BIT EASIER TO SIT LIKE A ROCK WHEN HALF YOUR BODY IS NUMB

am pretty sure I have MS.' When I returned from my trip my neurologist used a few choice words and put me on a week of massive steroids (I'm really liking this guy! I appreciate straight shooters).

"The steroids stabilised me but damage was done. A new MRI showed several areas of old and new scarring in my brain; however, a definitive diagnosis requires three events separated by place and time. I had two covered. But I needed a spinal tap for definitive proof. In my opinion, tattoos hurt way more than a spinal tap. If you ever need to get one, don't hesitate and don't sweat it. My spinal fluid revealed a break down of nerve proteins consistent with MS. A ten-year rollercoaster ride was over. I was officially diagnosed with MS in June 2017.

"All the symptoms I mentioned thus far are now part of my daily life. They come and go depending on how much I push myself. The odd 22 pills I take control some of my symptoms. Currently, I am working on finding my new-normal. I need to pace myself, hydrate more, eat better, and lessen stress (I still follow my zen master's advice). I appreciate what I have. I appreciate mobility. I appreciate vision. I appreciate my network of friends too. Meeting others with MS is helpful too. It is uplifting to talk to people who connect with some of the challenges you experience. Reach out to me if you want to talk. Of course, I laugh, I cry, I still have the occasional pity party, and I get frustrated. I wasn't devastated by a chronic illness diagnosis; I am simply embracing the freedom that comes with every sunrise.

"This past December I finished my traps with Sean. Fortunately I had one finished a year earlier and the other outlined the last session we had. I hated to cancel my last appointment but was recovering from the last exasperation.



tion. I am used to long back-to-back sessions. Come to think about it, I guess it was probably a bit easier to sit like a rock when half your body is numb. Sean has suggested doing shorter three-hour sessions (that is fancy tattooist talk for I care about you and have your best interests in mind). And he was spot on with that call. The original concept of the tattoos was a representation of good and evil. The meaning of these tattoos for me has shifted. Now they also represent the good and bad that comes with life—a duality of ups and downs. They represent the impermanent nature of it all." ▣

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Japanese Whispers

We easily, while thinking about Japanese tattooing, tend to forget the artists emerging from the new generation of tattooers coming from the far East. Artists who are not so much attracted by traditional irezumi, but who grabbed western art like foreigners did with the masters of ukiyo-e. Nobu Isobe is one of these and certainly one you should keep an eye on

YOU'VE BEEN VISITING EUROPE MORE OFTEN RECENTLY, WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE?

I started coming to Europe, maybe 4 or 5 years ago? What happened was we were organising King of Tattoo - the Tokyo tattoo convention - with Katsuta Noriyuki (boss of Tokyo Hardcore Tattoo Studio where Nobu works) and one year, we invited Teo Miliev, a tattooer from Lyon in France, also owner of the studio 681 Tattoos. After we met I started doing guest spots there, then I went to the Paris convention (Le Mondial du Tatouage) and Barcelona as well from 2016, then Bruxelles, for conventions, guest spots, etc. I found Europe to be very easy to travel around. For me, it's a good chance to see something a bit different, new stuff that I don't really see in Japan because the most popular style in Japan is traditional Japanese. Plus, the tattooing skill in Europe is incredible, there are a lot of good tattoo artists, way more artistic compared to Japan.

WESTERN ART HAS A STRONG INFLUENCE IN YOUR WORK, I GUESS YOU FEEL FAMILIAR WHEN YOU COME HERE?

I've been getting more influenced by classical art since I'm coming to Europe for the last five years. Before I was more into contemporary art. I really enjoy that I can travel and take pictures I'll use. I don't take any references but I use my pictures as a reference.



The most popular style in Japan is traditional Japanese and there are a lot of good tattoo artists in Europe, way more artistic compared to Japan

WHERE DO YOU GET INSPIRATION FROM?

From pretty much everything: sculptures, furniture, beer bottles! You have to be aware all the time. You don't really have to draw or paint five or seven hours a day - of course, it's better if you can do it but in reality you can't. So you have to use your brain to get inspired and analyse how things are working up. I go to exhibitions all the time: classic art, contemporary, etc. When I have time in Europe I love to go to museums, just sitting there and do some sketch. I go to see paintings, sculptures... I was so surprised in France how good the museums were. I really love France. It's so different, it's the opposite Japan in every way. Totally opposite. But it's very old and I guess there are some similarities too.

YOU STARTED BY STUDYING WESTERN ART RIGHT?

I was an art student in California. I have a bachelor degree in 2D art. I came to college in Los Angeles because I didn't want to go to university in Japan, there's no freedom there. By the time I was playing basketball, I had that American culture background that I was admiring, and the west-coast punks like NOFX that I loved. When I had to choose my majors at school, I chose art; that's how I started drawing and became more interested in western art. There are a lot of good museums in LA where I could study. After that I went to university for four years.

One of my classmates worked in a tattoo studio. He took



me to his shop when I decided to get tattooed for the first time at 20 years old I. His boss asked me if I wanted to be an apprentice and I was like: 'Why not?'. I didn't know anything, but I started there, at Resurrection Tattoo in Pasadena 10 years ago. I had to do everything from script writing, portraits, Japanese, etc. When people come in a tattoo shop you have to satisfy the different tastes. My background is more like a black & grey, because of the black & grey thing in LA, the chicano culture, the portraits, etc. I finally left America because of visa problem and I got back to Tokyo.

YOU DECIDED TO KEEP ON WORKING DIFFERENT STYLES AT THE SAME TIME, WHY?

I think I would get bored focusing on one specific thing.

You don't really have to draw or paint five or seven hours a day, of course it's better if you can do it but in reality you can't

Plus, in Tokyo it's impossible to specialise yourself. It's a very low demand here. You can't compare it with Lyon or Paris. So I have to make money from the variety of my clients and that keeps me motivated to do all kind of stuff. Japanese people ask everything here, there's no trend; apart from Japanese tattoos that are popular. Besides that, it's hard to say what is popular, people ask so many different things and sizes: small and middle tattoos, sometimes big. Japan doesn't have that strong background for the realistic tattoo - portraits - and they're still not really popular. I have at the moment a huge clientele of foreigners - maybe 30-40% - living in Tokyo or travelling here. Somehow, I think I get kind of lucky with my 'creepy-dark-bizarre-black-and-grey-sometimes-realistic' stuff because there are not so many guys who can do that.

SOMETHING YOU LIKE A LOT.

The dark stuff comes from tattooing obviously, because



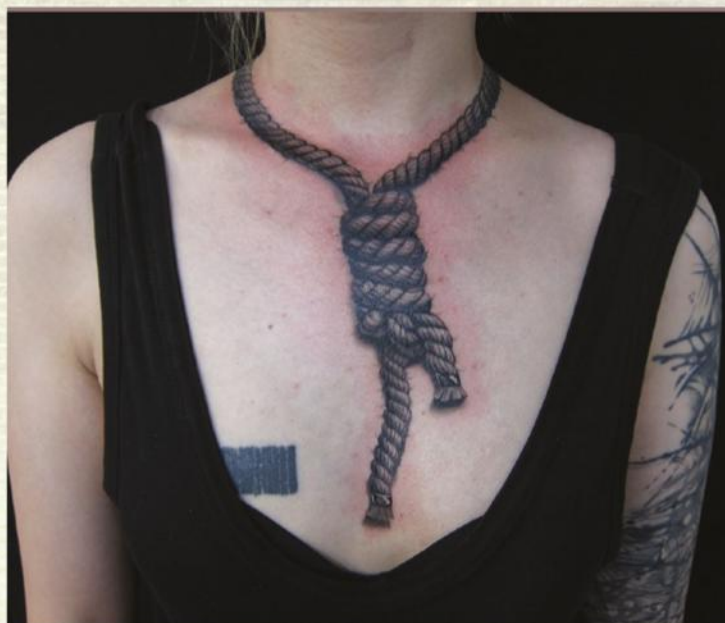


We have very dark and strange art in Japan too, like a gore or ghost type of thing

since I started I'm a big fan of Roberto Hernandez, he's doing such great stuff. Paul Booth as well.

YOU TOLD ABOUT THIS CREEPY-MORBID ASPECT IN YOUR WORK, WHAT ABOUT THE DARK SIDE IN JAPANESE ART?

We have very dark and strange art in Japan too, like a 'gore' or 'ghost' type of thing. For example there is the work of mangaka Suehiro Maruho, he's a comic artist doing really creepy stuff and some people really like it. I guess it comes from our strange history, especially after we lost the war. But people get fascinated by something... unusual. If I can show something like that it would be very interesting. There's some kind of feelings in that kind of Japanese dark art which are a little bit different from the west. If I could show a little bit the difference it would make good tattoos.



IN TOKYO YOU'RE WORKING AT TOKYO HARDCORE STUDIO, WHICH IS A STREET SHOP. REGARDING THE TRIAL OF TAIKI MASUDA (THE TATTOOER OF OSAKA HAS GONE TO COURT TO FIGHT FOR THE LEGALISATION OF TATTOOING AFTER SEVERAL SHOPS GOT CLOSED), DID IT CHANGE ANYTHING FOR YOU?

We shut down the website two years ago but nothing really changed. The cops even came to the shop! We're not hiding, we have a sign on the street. If Taiki didn't fight back, everything would be finished. Nobody really knew tattooing was illegal until then, now everybody knows because of the news. Actually I'm quite surprised because everybody knows about it in the western world but nobody really cares in Tokyo. We just live day by day. We don't know what will happen so we'll see.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT MAYBE GETTING BACK TO THE UNDERGROUND IF TATTOOING GETS ILLEGAL?

I don't really care actually. If we have to close the shops and work in apartment, it's not gonna make any change. Let's say: it's like in New York 20 years ago when you had to know how to find a tattoo artist, plus the fact that we have smartphones now... I'm only worried about the hygiene problems.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOVING OUT OF JAPAN ?

Yeah, it's a possibility but I love Japan.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND TAIKI'S MOTIVATION TO GO TO COURT?

Of course, to me they're doing the right thing. Justice could be fighting back to the police but he lost the case, which is pretty negative for the next trial. So what's the point? Tattooing has been in a grey zone for a long time in Japan, it may have been better not to fight back, to stay there forever... We have to survive with this job, we have to pay for the rent, etc. What about the old tattoo artists and the respect for them too? It's very sensitive. If we make the change in Japan, we'll lose some of the conservative point of tattooing and I'll be very sad. ▣



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DIRTY REALISM

If you can draw, can you therefore also tattoo without too much stress or are the two disciplines poles apart in spite of all they have in common? We fired up this occasional series to see if we could uncover any concrete answers. This issue, we talk to Jamie Christ to make a dent in it...

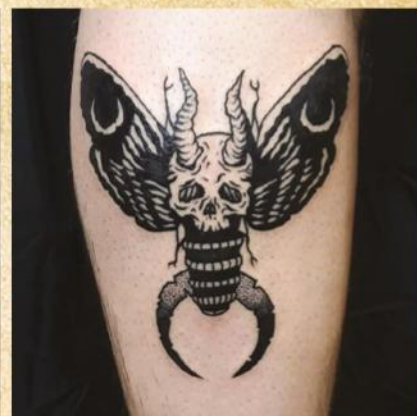
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HOW LONG DID YOU WORK AS AN ILLUSTRATOR AND DID YOU COME UP THROUGH THE 'OFFICIAL' ROUTE OR DECIDE YOU WERE JUST GOING TO GET ON WITH IT AND CARVE YOUR OWN PATH?

I actually began by doing artwork for music bands in my spare time. I first started playing in bands when I was 14, so I've been producing t-shirt designs and artwork for 15 years now, at first just for myself but then for other bands too.

Since tattooing wasn't initially an option for me (due to a strict 'no tattoo' policy at home) I went down the route of graphic design and ended up working for a company creating architectural visualisations. I quickly realised that this wasn't for me because of the total lack of creative freedom in the job. I then started working offshore as a roughneck and when that came to an end I decided it was time to pursue my childhood dream to become a tattooer. I worked as a shop manager at StudioXIII in Edinburgh for a year and a half and learned so much from the awesome guys there about drawing for tattoos and about the business in general. I now work as an apprentice at Rock N Roll Tattoo.

IT'S A TOUGH LINE OF WORK. OVER THESE LAST TWENTY YEARS AT LEAST, THE NUMBER OF COMPANIES WHO WILL COMMISSION WORK IS TINY COMPARED TO WHAT IT USED



TO BE—AND I THINK THAT'S HAD A REAL DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON LETTING PEOPLE SHINE. IS THAT SOME OF THE REASON WHY YOU HEADED TOWARDS TATTOOING?

Illustration is great because you have total artistic freedom—if you can imagine something then you can draw it—whereas with tattooing there's some restriction because you have to consider the logistical implications and healing of the design. I really love the craft and historical element of tattooing, though. I want to be a tattooer first and foremost but still continue with illustration—I hope the two practices can be mutually beneficial.

WAS THERE A LIGHTBULB MOMENT WHERE YOU FIGURED TATTOOING MIGHT BE THE VERY THING FOR YOU OR HAS IT BEEN A LONG STANDING AMBITION?



If I started at a younger age, I would never have reached the level of hard work and discipline I have thanks to those other experiences

Tattooing has been my dream since I first saw a tattoo shop aged around 7 years old. I asked my mum what it was and she said it was a shop where people get tattoos put on them. Before that I thought they just appeared on people haha! I couldn't believe that someone just got to sit in there and draw on people all day.

As I said earlier, I grew up in a strict 'no tattoos' household so becoming a tattooer didn't seem like an option, until I hit 27 and the opportunity opened up for me. I'm glad that I spent the time in other jobs before tattooing, though. If I had started this apprenticeship at a younger age I would never have reached the level of hard work and discipline that I have now thanks to those other experiences.

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING—BECAUSE A LOT OF PEOPLE PROBABLY THINK IF THEY CAN DRAW, THEY CAN TATTOO—WHAT'S BEEN THE

BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS YOU'VE STARTED TO DIG IN? THE MACHINE? THE MOBILE CANVAS? OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

The way I describe it to people is that it's like trying to learn to draw on butter. At first I was using coils and I found that quite difficult (especially since I was also using disposable grips due to a lack of autoclave). Then I was encouraged to try a rotary machine instead and I instantly felt that I had much more control.

After switching machines I actually found it weird how familiar the whole process began to feel. Once the initial fear of the first few lines is gone and I'm in the zone I really feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing in life.

AND THE UNENVIABLE QUESTION I HAVE TO ASK IS, HOW PLEASED WERE YOU WITH YOUR FIRST TATTOO... ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10?



A hard 1 out of 10. I utterly despised it. I would stare at it every day thinking about all the dumb things I did wrong. I tattooed myself every day for a week before I even started thinking about tattooing someone else. I recently re-lined it, though, and now it doesn't upset my soul quite as much as when I first did it!

YOU'RE A BIG FAN OF WRITERS LIKE BUKOWSKI AND KEROUAC—AS YOU PROGRESS CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH THEM APPEARING IN YOUR WORK?

Yes. For instance, today I tattooed a design based on Bukowski's poem 'Bluebird'. I want my tattoos to be like a visual representation of his writing—hard-hitting and tragically beautiful. Kerouac is brilliant for painting pictures with his words. It's almost too easy to build a design from his writing. I also love to listen to Tom Waits for drawing inspiration. His metaphors are gritty and pain-

On the surface they appear tough and mean, but if you look a little deeper you realise they're delicate and vulnerable

fully romantic, which is the kind of quality I want my drawings to have—on the surface they appear tough and mean, but if you look a little deeper you realise they're delicate and vulnerable.

WHAT I'D LIKE TO DO IS HAVE A SIMILAR DISCUSSION IN SIX MONTHS TO SEE WHERE YOU'RE AT—I'M GOING TO ASSUME YOU WOULD BE GAME FOR SUCH A THING—BUT WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM YOURSELF COME AUGUST? GREAT STRIDES? LITTLE STEPS?—I GUESS THE QUESTION IS: DOES TATTOOING



The way I describe it to be people is that it's like trying to learn to draw on butter...

FEEL NATURAL FOR YOU OR SLIGHTLY ALIEN. NOT EVERYBODY GETS ALONG WITH IT, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE IDEA APPEALS.

I'd be thrilled if everything keeps going the same way it is at the moment. I'm really lucky to have people willing to get my designs tattooed on them. Although I hope that I will be more confident by then, so I don't have to get my mentors to calm me down before every tattoo! I'm also building a clothing company with my childhood friend, and tattooer, Jack Peppiette. Hopefully by August it will be fully up and running.

ARE YOU CONTINUING WITH ILLUSTRATION WORK AS YOU MOVE ALONG?

Yes definitely. I look at tattooing as being a particular application of my illustration. I hope that tattooing will bring me more illustration work and vice versa.

PRESUMABLY YOU HAVE ILLUSTRATION HEROES AND TATTOOERS ALSO—ARE THEY VERY DIFFERENT IN THE WORK THEY DELIVER OR ARE THERE LOTS OF SIMILARITIES IN THESE PEOPLE?

When it comes to illustration some of my favourite artists are Adrian Baxter, Sineater, Business for Satan, Grindesign and Godmachine, but my tattoo heroes aren't necessarily what you'd expect given my style. I'm more interested in peoples' skill at tattooing, rather than just their style.



I really like Sneaky Mitch, Duncan X, Daniel Baczewski and Alexander Grim, but my favourite tattooer has to be Mishla of Seny/Parliament tattoo.

Getting tattooed by him for the first time was a huge turning point in my life. Not only was I blown away by the tattoo he did for me, but he was such a friendly, humble and open person. After that my passion for drawing and determination to improve intensified and hasn't dulled since.

FINALLY, WHAT MACHINES AND INKS ARE YOU USING—THE QUESTION IS DEFINITELY WORTH ASKING TO SEE HOW YOUR OPINION CHANGES AS TIME MOVES ALONG

Machine-wise I'm using an Inkjekta Flite Nano. Of course so far I've only done black tattoos and most of the stuff I have on myself was done with Dynamic ink and it's BLACK so I've stuck with that. Once I'm more comfortable, I will experiment with different things, but when you're so inexperienced, it's pointless to use different inks because you can't really tell if it's you or the equipment that's making a difference between tattoos. ▣

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Artwork by Richard Guy



Contrary to popular opinion, there is good material on the internet. Not all the time, but now and again you can strike something that looks a lot like gold. This piece originally appeared on the Medium platform and it was so well thought out and presented, I contacted Olivia Semple [obviously the author] and we agreed it also deserved an airing with its target audience. Thus, accompanied by some great tattooing I've accumulated here over the last month, I present to you a rather excellent article about 'touching'...

#metoo

I went to the supermarket with my mother the other day. I grabbed a cart and followed her in, and no sooner had I set foot inside the store than a set of pasty-white, blonde-knuckled, cigarette-smelling, pudgy little hands were caressing my forearm. "Beautiful!" said the owner of these hands.

WORDS: OLIVIA SEMPLE · medium.com/@OliviaSemple IMAGES: As credited

He was wearing the pale-blue polo shirt worn by the market's employees. He had on a name-tag, too, though I didn't bother to read it. I looked up at his face and arched my brows. "Hello?" I suggested.

But he paid no mind to my face. His eyes were locked onto my tattoos.

"It's okay!" he assured me, "I have them all over my back!"

"So you probably don't have strangers touching you in public without so much as a hello first, then?" I replied, a little shocked at how direct I was being.

"I just love them so much," he didn't apologise. "Addictive, aren't they?"

"Well, hello anyway," I shrugged.

He trotted out into the mall and I joined my mother by the bananas. "Did he touch you?" she asked me. I rolled my eyes.

A few minutes later I was overcome by the stench of cigarettes at the far end of the produce department. The walking ashtray in the blue polo had sidled up next to me and before I could move an inch he put his hands up apologetically. "I am truly sorry," he said. "I don't know what came over me, I wasn't thinking."

This was not at all what I'd expected, so it took me a second to react. "Happens all the time," I reassured him, "But it doesn't make it okay." I thanked him for the apology as he walked away, and I meant it.

BEING A VISIBLY TATTOOED WOMAN (AKA "BAD MANNER MAGNET")

I have spent my entire adult life as a visibly tattooed wom-



an, and though strangers have fondled me on an almost daily basis, I can count on my fingers the number of apologies I've received for bad manners.

I remember being nineteen in my hometown of Montreal, standing on a corner on a hot summer day, waiting for the pedestrian signal to cross the street. It was my first summer with a full sleeve, and for the first time that day an older man put his hands on me

so that he could "look".

He grabbed my forearm and said "Wow!" Then he proceeded to pull and turn it every which way so he could admire the underside and back as he pleased, and, when I pulled my arm away, he tightened his grip. His wife stood right behind him, mortified. "Relax," he said to me in paternalistic French, "I'm just looking. That's why you got them, right?"

I was much feistier then, and this man had a comb-over on par with the one that now sits in the Oval Office.

"No, it's not," I snapped. "Besides, looking is something you do with your eyes, not your hands. Otherwise I'd admire your hair like this!" I reached over and tousled his comb-over. His wife burst out laughing. A couple of people on the street stopped to watch. The man just stood there, mouth agape, little beads of sweat glistening off his scalp.

The last thing I saw before I crossed the street was his wife clapping her hands and gasping for air, tears rolling down her cheeks.

A NATURAL IMPULSE

In the years since that incident I've softened up quite a bit. I've come to appreciate that we all have a natural impulse



Cesar DeCesaro

to reach out and touch pretty things. I do it with flowers and puppies, with friends in cashmere sweaters. I have, at least once that I can remember, caressed the skin of a tattooed person, too (though that person was a friend, not a stranger). I immediately caught myself and apologized.

I have been petted and pulled, examined and disrobed, by men and women alike. Women are often the most aggressive clothing-pullers. I once had a plastic-surgeried Beverly Hills-type actually yank my shirt up in my place of work so that she could see more of my back tattoo (it had peeked out when I reached up to grab something for her off a high shelf). Not long ago I had a granny hike up my dress to see my legs while we were standing in line at a coffee shop. When I wear long sleeves to avoid the attention, which is frequent, people often feel entitled to pull my shirtsleeves right up my arm — even if it means stretching my shirt.

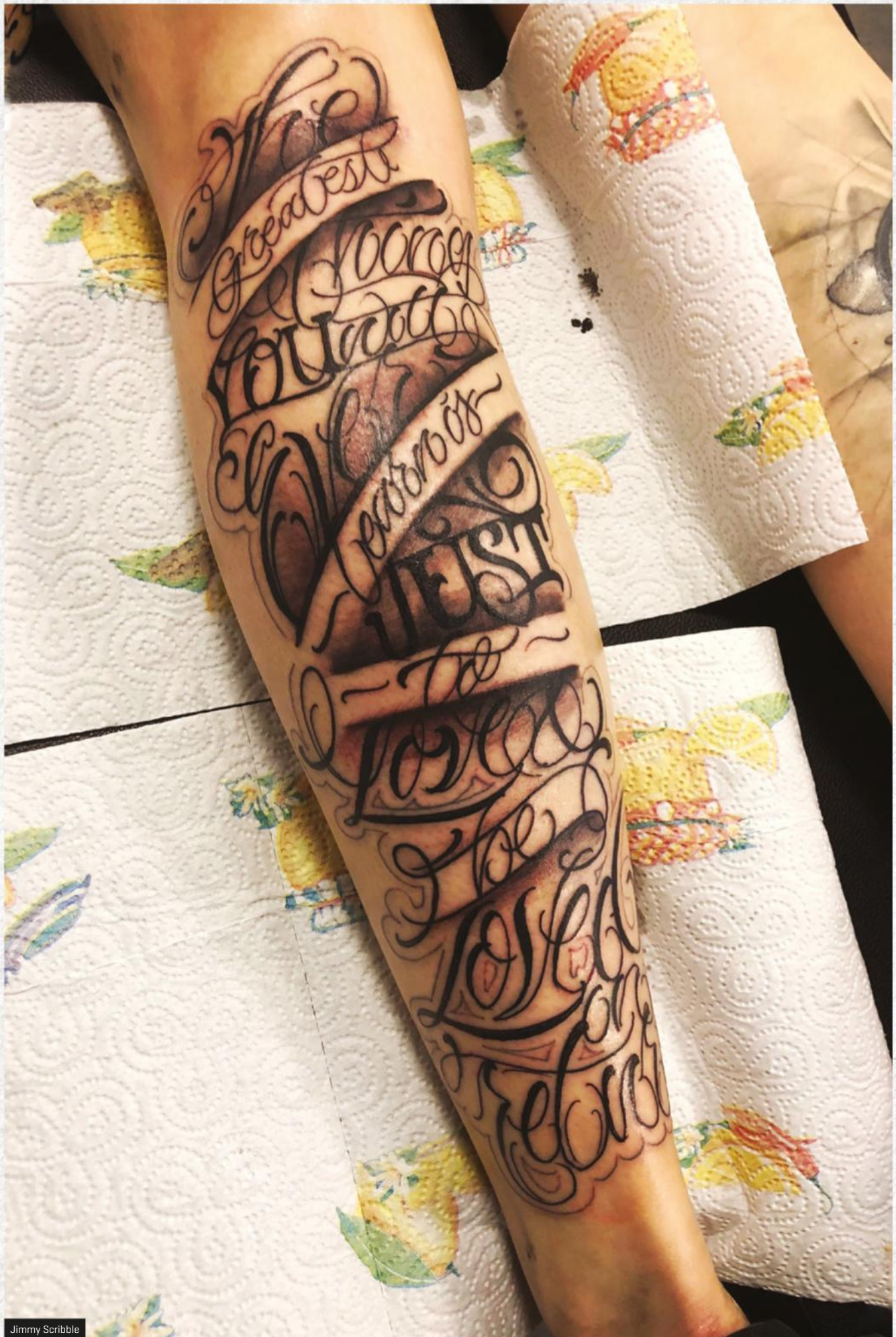
I understand the impulse, I really do. I also hold dear the belief that most people are kind, and mean well. But there comes a point when curiosity becomes invasive, when admiration turns disrespectful.

THE DOUBLE-WHAMMY OF WOMANHOOD

The conversations I've been having on the heels of the #metoo movement have led me to do a lot of thinking about this. More specifically about the argument that no matter what a woman chooses to wear, she is never "asking for it." I think clarity is important here. Asking



Guillaume Smash



Jimmy Scribble



Jon Potter



Alex Alvarado

for what? Attention? Or rape? Clearly, no one ever asks for the latter. “Asking for attention,” however, is a not as black and white — especially if your skin is purple, green and yellow.

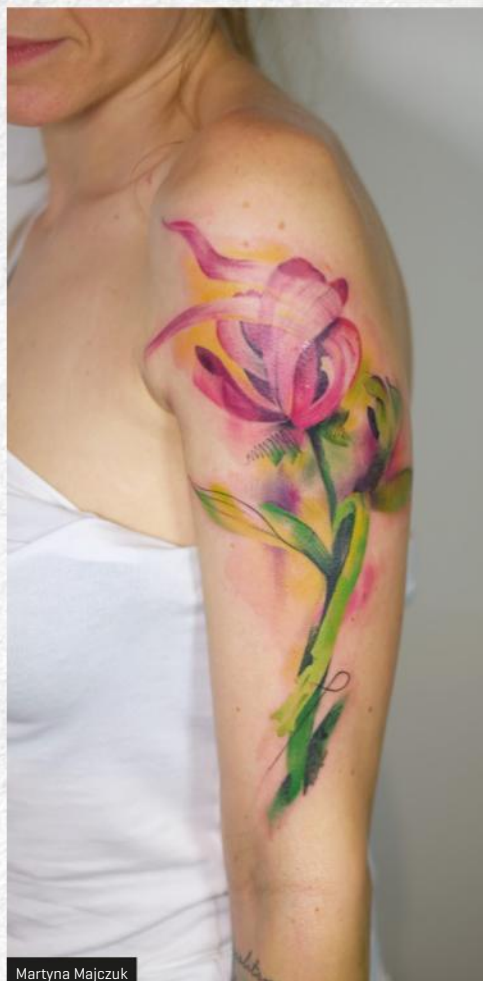
As a tattooed woman, I face a double whammy: if I wear revealing clothing (and I am a rather conservative dresser) then, according to some, I am asking for both sexual attention and attention based on my tattoos. “Ah, but you chose to get the tattoos,” a so-called feminist once told me. While that’s true, I also choose to wear a flattering bra and, more often than not, a touch of makeup. Do those choices mean I’m asking to be cat-called, too?

There’s something about being a woman that just makes it easier for people to reach out and touch. About ten years ago I shaved my head. It looked good on me, my partner loved it, and I would have kept the cut had it not been for people petting my head everywhere I went. Other women with shaved heads have since corroborated this phenomenon to me. I once had a beautiful pregnant woman with a shaved head tell me that she had to start wearing big hats once she got pregnant because, between her head and her growing belly, she felt like she was being molested whenever she left the house.

I’ve never seen a man with a shaved head or a potbelly get treated this way by strangers. I have a couple of friends in Hollywood who are big, attractive, muscular actor-types. Sometimes, flirtatious women squeeze their biceps. It’s uninvited contact, and shouldn’t happen either but, they have told me, it only happens in the context of a conversation. I should also point out that, when



Rob Sedgebeer



Martyna Majczuk

I'm out in public with these men, no one ever touches me without asking. Draw your own conclusions about what that means in 2018.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

Do I want to condemn or scream obscenities at everyone who touches me without asking first? No. What I want is to deepen the dialogue about not just women's rights but overall objectification of the human body. I'd like to know that, after reading this, maybe someone will think twice before reaching out and touching tattooed skin—or pregnant bellies, or bulging biceps, for that matter, without asking first.

I was surprised by the words that came out of my mouth at the supermarket the other day because I usually let the bad manners slide. But I'm tired of it (aren't we all?) and the #metoo ripple has renewed my willingness to speak up.

My mother and I had an interesting conversation later on. "Every woman I know has been inappropriately touched at some point in her life," she said. "What's the point of exposing these men after all this time? Are we going to start throwing people in prison twenty years after the fact?"

To be fair, she was merely raising a philosophical question, not debating the point, and she comes from the generation for whom a slap on the butt in the office was a rite of passage, not a lawsuit waiting to happen. However, I



Adam Osborn



Nick Devine



Jack Cordwell



Alan Aldred

reminded her, she also comes from the generation that made it possible for me to not experience that same rite of passage. And we know we still have work to do.

ASKING FOR ATTENTION... AND DIGNITY

I have talked to many women who were considering visible tattoos about “asking for attention” and what it means in the context of the tattooed-woman-double-whammy. As a feisty nineteen year old I perceived the slightest gaze in my direction as a violation of my dignity. Today I understand that I’ve been tattooed by some of the greatest living tattoo artists and people can’t help but be drawn to the beautiful images on my skin. I must assume that if I leave my house with skin exposed, I am inviting curiosity – just as a busty woman with a low-cut top and a push-up bra is inviting some admiration of her cleavage.

I have come to understand that my responsibility lies entirely in how I present myself to the world and in how I react to the people who violate my space. To be clear, my responsibility also ends there – right where yours begins.

Do I regret my reaction to the stranger on the street corner in Montreal, all those years ago? I don’t. It was the best I could do at the time. I am, however, proud of the patience and understanding I’ve developed in the years since. That’s what allowed me to let the supermarket guy hold on to his dignity while I defended mine.

I may be a woman, and one of these days I may wear a skimpy outfit and go out dancing, but that doesn’t make it okay for anyone to touch me without my consent. Shouldn’t the same apply to my tattoos?

Besides, they feel just like regular skin does.

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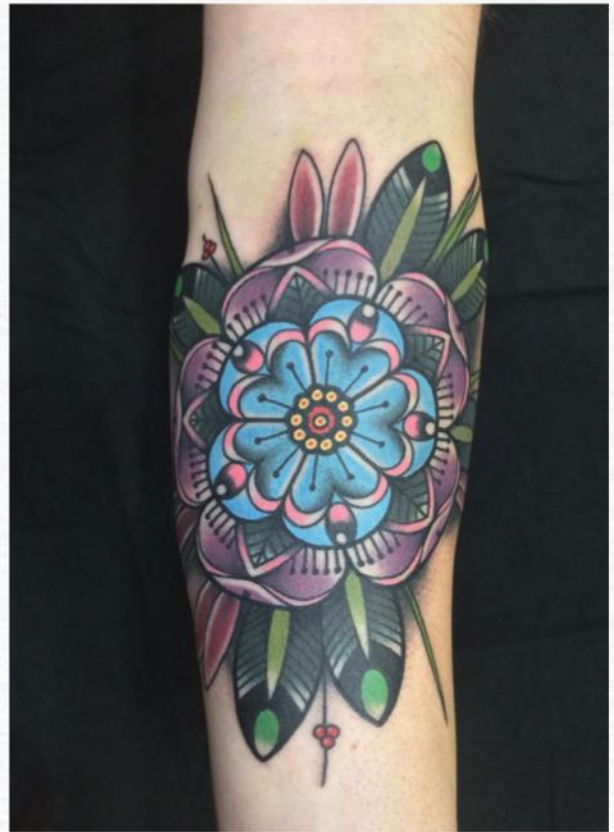
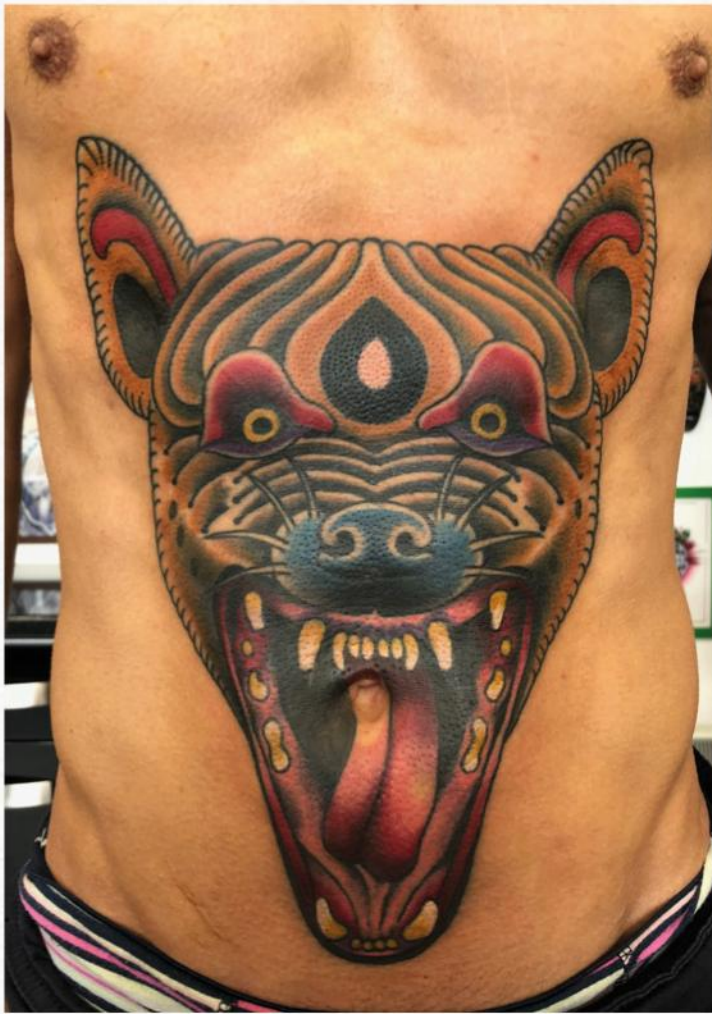
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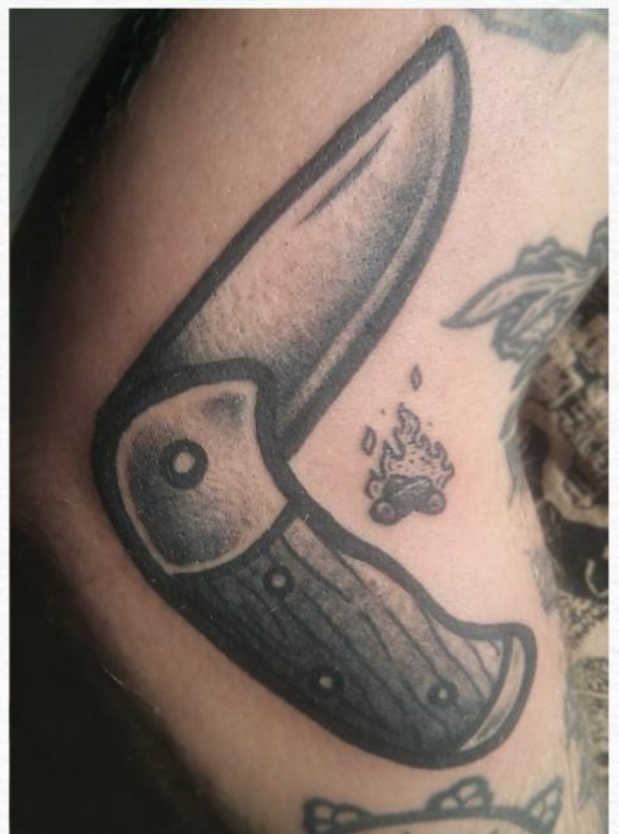


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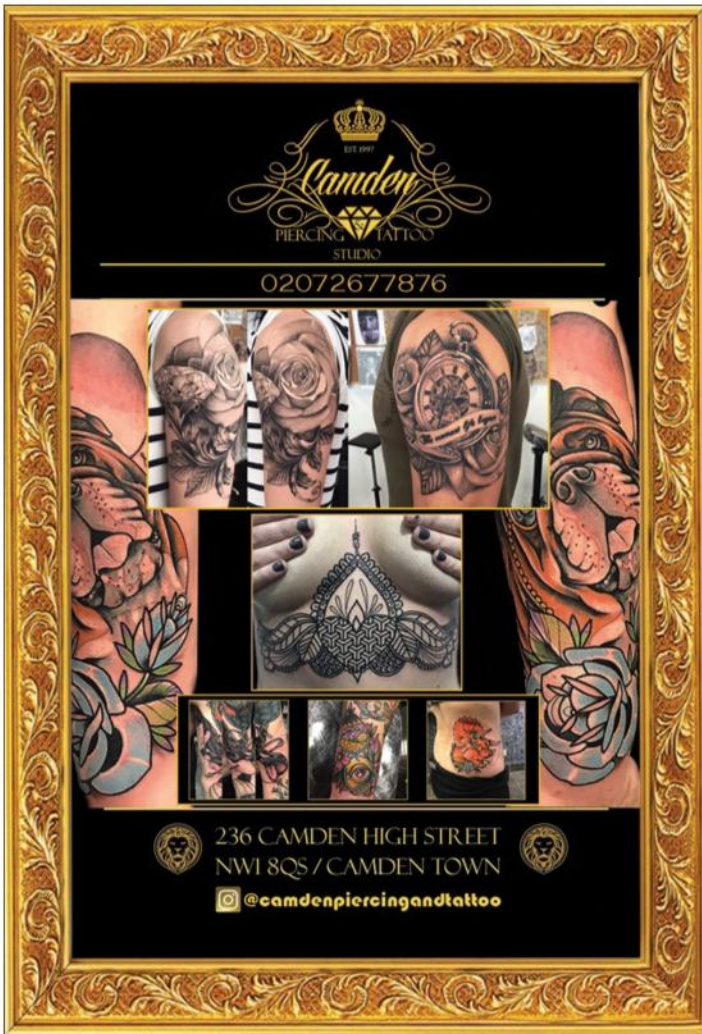
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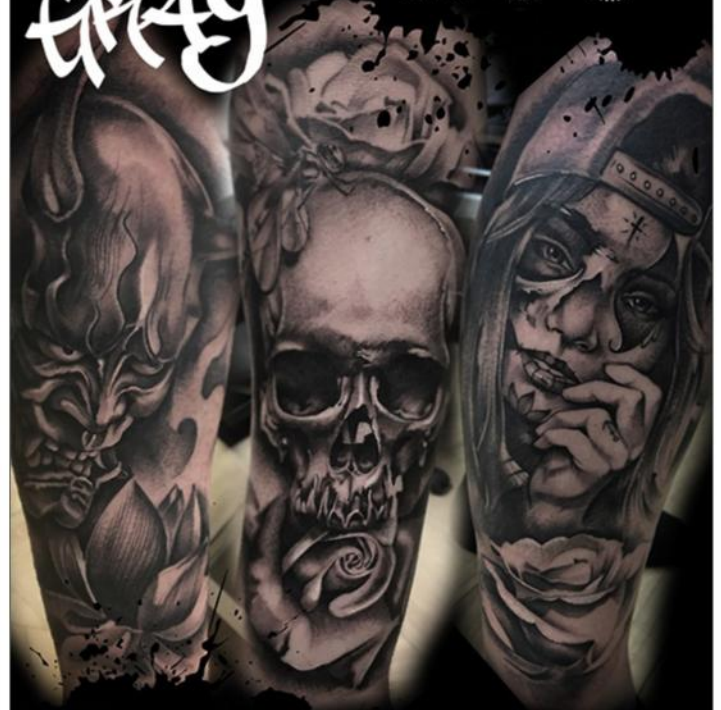
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by
Alan Aldred



Alan Aldred

Do we need a reason to love a Godzilla sleeve? Aside from the fact that nobody here has ever seen one before, I think not. There's pretty much everything you need to know in there that's for sure. Once upon a time—and not so long ago either—a pop culture tattoo was a fragment of the big picture. A simple Jack Skellington with no context to it. A Joker tattoo was his face and little else,

but as we get more and more adventurous with our decisions, great sleeves like this become possible.

This is not a flash in the pan idea—it's well thought out and you know what the best part is? I can see the look on Alan's face when he was asked to do it. In a world full of repeat offenders and a quick surf of google for something to bang out in an afternoon, that's priceless.

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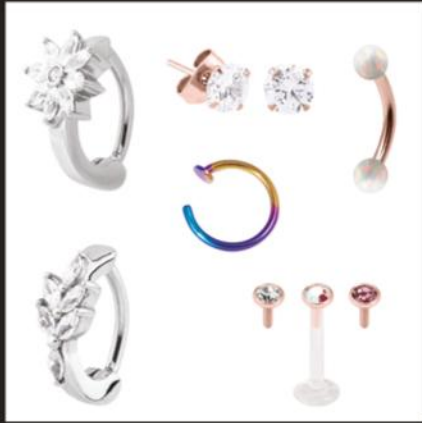
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