

Tattoos NI!

KEEP 'ER LIT... KEEP 'ER LOCAL

LUKE SOMERVILLE

The Interview - We chat to Luke Somerville about his inspiration, tattooing in NI and why Japanese art is his biggest influence.

CHRIS HILL

The Artist Feature - this month, Belfast City Skinworks' own Chris Hill writes a feature on the industry.

READER STORY

Our readers get the chance to tell us the story behind their favourite tattoo and what it means to them.

DESIGNS

ARTISTS **FEATURES**

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STUDIOS



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WELCOME

Northern Ireland is on the map for all the right reasons. We've got worldwide media and film, television shows and some fantastic musicians - but (and call me biased if you want to) I think it is our tattoo scene that is worthy of it's worldwide recognition. Our "homegrown" talent is rocking the worldwide stage for all the right reasons and it feels pretty good.

The summer brings with it convention season, and in this issue check out what we got up to when we headed out to the Maiden City Ink Tattoo Convention and the NI Tattoo Convention. We've also got an article written by Ritchie Connor from Primal Ink Tattoo in Armagh and an editorial from the brains behind Purebred Apparel.

The design pages give plenty to inspire you towards your next inking, and if you are interested in getting the work done or buying some prints do hit up the artists for a chat - their details are listed under their work.

Recent studio work showcases some of our favourite pieces from our artists. When I see it all laid out like that, I am blown away by the sheer talent we have here at home.

When Tattoo's NI was a burgeoning idea, I don't think we saw it as being a magazine, or gaining the support it has this year. We've been completely blown away by the love and kind words from all of you, it's what keeps us going to achieve more and really get the tattoo scene of which we are so proud of out there. We've had a lot of fun putting this issue together, and hope you enjoy it. Keep an eye out on the website and facebook for further events and notices to come - it's a very exciting time for us here at Tattoo's NI and it's great to have you along.

Peace,

Kezzy

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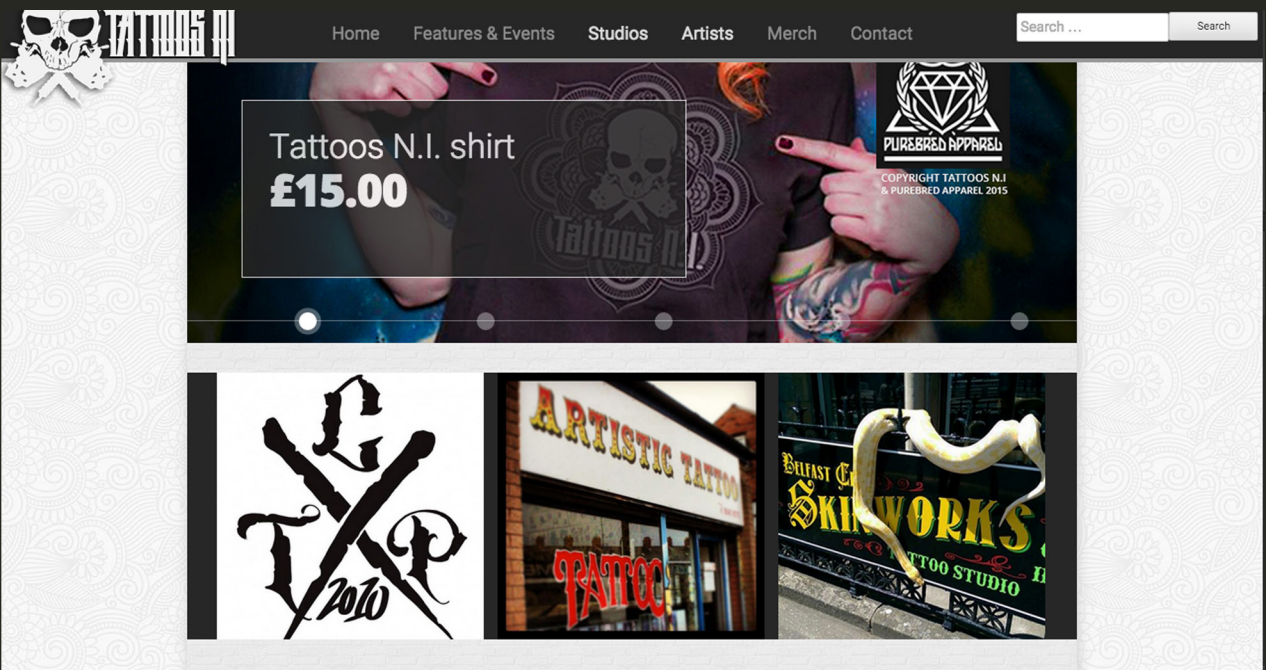
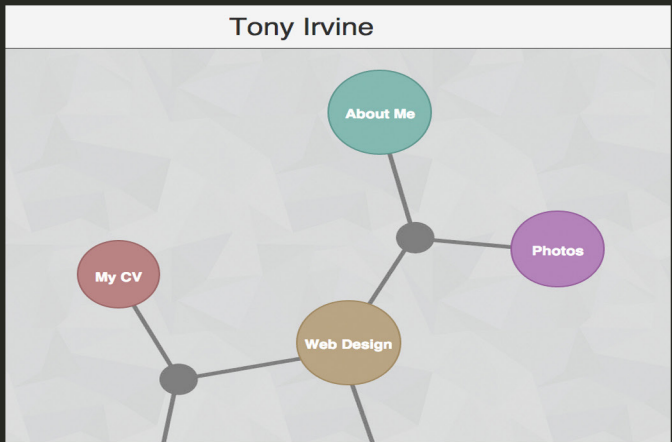
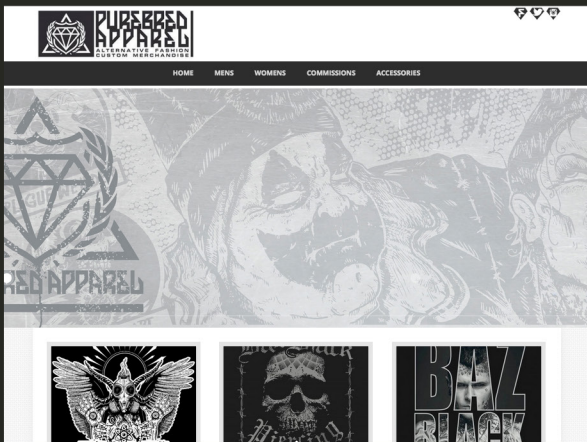
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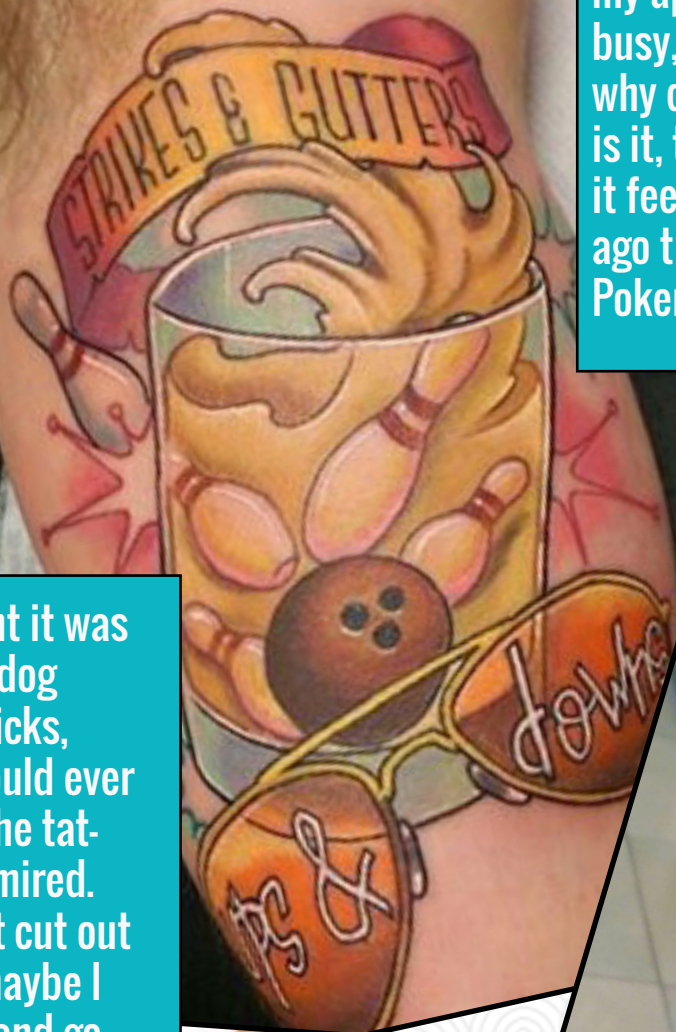
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CHRIS HILL



CHRIS HILL
TATTOOS

This month,unbelievably, I will have been tattooing for two years, I'm fresh outta my apprenticeship, and thankfully, I'm busy, like, VERY busy. So far so good, so why do I still feel like an apprentice? Why is it, that every time I try something new, it feels like that terrifying day two years ago that I nervously tattooed a wonky Pokemon onto my own leg?



At first I thought it was just me, an old dog learning new tricks, hoping that I could ever be as good as the tattoo artists I admired. Perhaps I'm not cut out for tattooing, maybe I should give up and go back to slinging pizzas for drunks, and leave behind the late nights of drawing and re-drawing designs for people who think I can magically pull drawings out of my ass. I make a lot of excuses, I started too late in life, I never studied art etc etc



I always imagined that once I'd gotten the pesky apprentice period out of the way, that I'd be imbued with some kind of mystical tattoo powers for my efforts, but no, same shit, different pay. But, as the saying goes, misery loves company, and if theres one thing thats kept me sane through my self doubt and tattoo anxieties, it's listening to my seasoned colleagues express the exact same frustrations.



I'm fortunate to be in a big studio, working along side artists at all different time zones in their careers. They all have two things in common, they're all exceptionally talented individuals, and they're all, upon occasion, miserable cunts. They all scroll through instagram with the same defeated faces while debating whether tattooing was ever a good idea. I can almost guarantee, that while my co-workers pass around a phone with Nikko Hurtados latest tattoo, like the world's saddest game of pass the parcel, Nikko is probably sat at home cursing the same tattoo over some tiny imperfection that only he can see. Or maybe not, because he's a fucking wizard...





...but that's neither here nor there, the point is, that tattooers by and large are a bunch of self-conscious, naval-gazing princesses caught up in their own little bubbles of dissatisfaction. Or at least the good ones are, and I hope that self-deprecation has a good effect on my work. I compare every tattoo I do to every other tattoo happening in the studio at the same time. It's friendly competition, and it forces everyone to up their game. I'd be lying if I said I haven't looked at Tommy's or Jamie's, or any of our other artists' work from time to time, and thought about what utter bastards they are for being so good at what they do. But it makes me work harder to be better.





Its not just the experienced guys that keep me on my toes either, now there are new apprentices coming up, and they're killing it. It seems like each new apprentice coming in has to out perform the one before. At the end of the day, this steady influx of new talent into the industry benefits tattooing as a whole. It pushes the standard of work up across the board, and hopefully squeezes the scratchers, the kitchen wizards and hipster opportunists out.

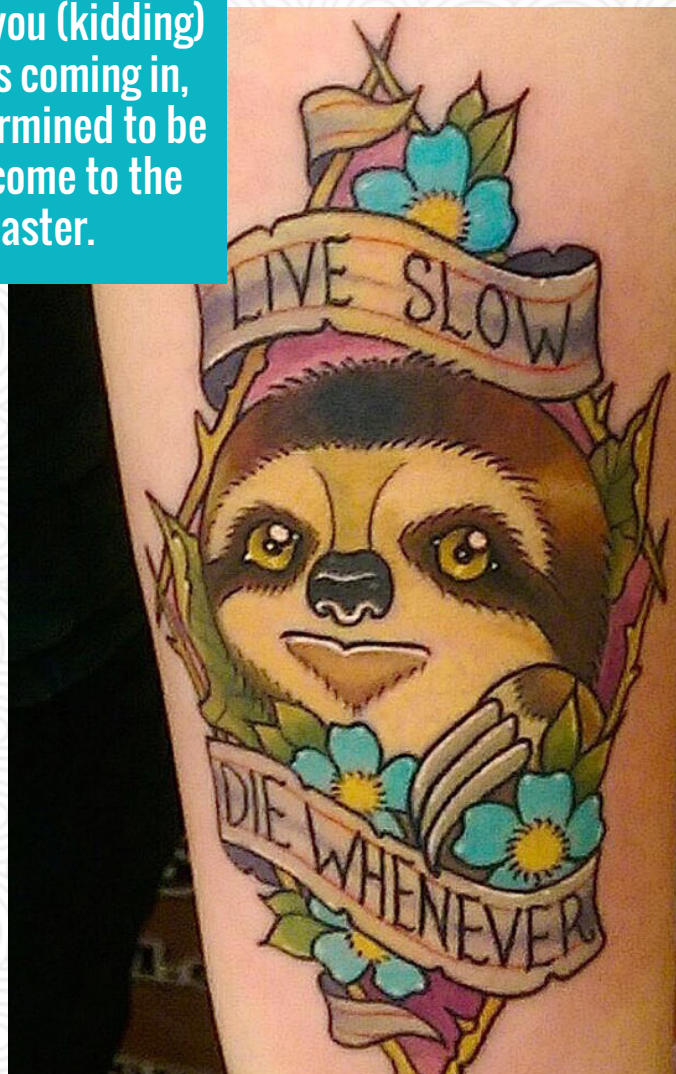
The constant pursuit to compete at the same level as the tattooers I admire is a cruel mistress, it's probably an unattainable goal, but I think if you're happy with everything you do, you're either deluded, or you're a total douchebag.



Like all artistic mediums its often evolution, not revolution. Each artist wants to surpass the work of their predecessors, to bring something new to the table. Some people achieve it, some don't, many would just be happy to eek out a living covering Super-Dry clad cretins in sweet tribal instead of getting a real job. As for me, I'll just crack on trying to be the best tattooer i can be, and struggling with the constant love/hate relationship that comes with it. I love to tat-too, I do it constantly, maybe 70 or 80 hours a week sometimes, often at the expense of more important things in my life. I still study everything I do with a critical eye, and so it becomes a vicious cycle. The constant struggle to improve and progress, and learn, and grow as an artist.



To all the incredible artists out there that have inspired me in my career thus far, I'm grateful to you for putting out work that makes me reevaluate my own work. I also hope Joe Pesci smashes your hands up with a hammer because you're such a talented motherfucker and I hate you (kidding) And to all the new artists coming in, that are serious and determined to be good tattoo artists- welcome to the emotional roller-coaster.





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JAY HILL

This is my most recent tattoo out of several I have, its the start of my personality/life sleeve.

I waited for 4 years to get this done by the right kinda artist and I was lucky enough to find him and have this piece done! It means so much to me as a personal symbol to my ongoing struggle with mental health and life itself ...*motto of it is*... "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger and even if there are tears you've lived to fight another day"...

The artist who done it is Wayne Ellis from Addicted To Ink Killyleagh. ... awesome price deal for the work and great experience for my first big tattoo! had great craic throughout the time and it healed amazingly quick and well afterwards smile emoticon think it was the perfect starter to my personality/life sleeve.

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MELANIE BREHAUT

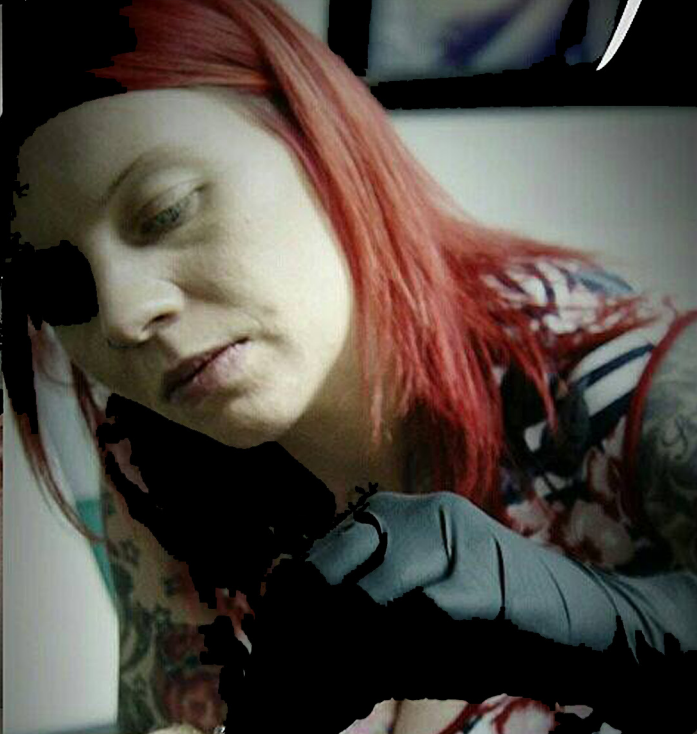
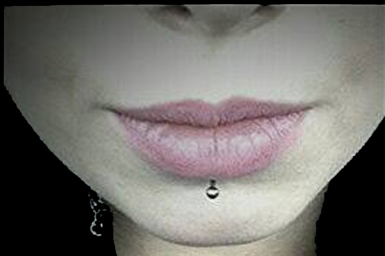
My favourite tattoo is actually a pair of tattoos! It's my 'cherry skulls' on my wrists, which were done by Karen Hogg at Zombie Bunny Ink in Stranmillis.

I love the way she has done them; most cherry skulls look quite kitsch or cutesy, but Karen has done mine as actual, proper skulls. We have quite similar interests (skulls being one of them!) so when we come up with ideas together the results are usually brilliant.

There's no real meaning behind them - they're just skulls, which are always cool - but the left one was a cover up of a tiny tatt which I felt was taking up valuable real estate! So Karen basically freehanded the left wrist, then mirrored it on my right wrist. I love the result, and will definitely be going back to her for more skulls! I highly recommend her for the quality of her work, particularly if you are into the darker things in life.

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Divine Modification



Primal Ink

45 THOMAS STREET ARMAGH

WIKI
SOMMERWIKI



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN TATTOOING?

I will be tattooing 4 years come August. It doesn't feel like 4 years at all, it has flew in! I was lucky to start my apprenticeship at an early age of 16. People talk about being a tattoo apprentice these days but you really don't know what being an apprentice is until you come along to Jacks Tattoos. My Dad, who taught me, is the pinnacle of old school. Says it how it is, a tad crazy and there is no messing around. It's pretty funny to look back on some of the things, one day you could come in starting a full sleeve with my Dad and the next session I, who had maybe only done 10 tattoos at the time was doing your next session. He really didn't care what people thought and I guess it's just that old school mentality. I really can't understand why he did it but it's just an example of how he was. They don't do guys like him anymore and I'm certainly grateful to have that experience with him.



CAN YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TATTOO YOU DID? WHAT WAS IT?

I can indeed and I don't think I'll ever forget! From no age I was always hanging around the shop when I wasn't at school. I was 11 at the time & it was a quiet Saturday afternoon. My Dad asked me did I want to do a tattoo. I don't think I could have put on those gloves that drowned my little hands quick enough! I drew on a cherry blossom on his arm and got cracking! I was so nervous but it was an amazing experience. It was from that moment on I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I never looked back!



WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE NORTHERN IRISH TATTOO INDUSTRY?

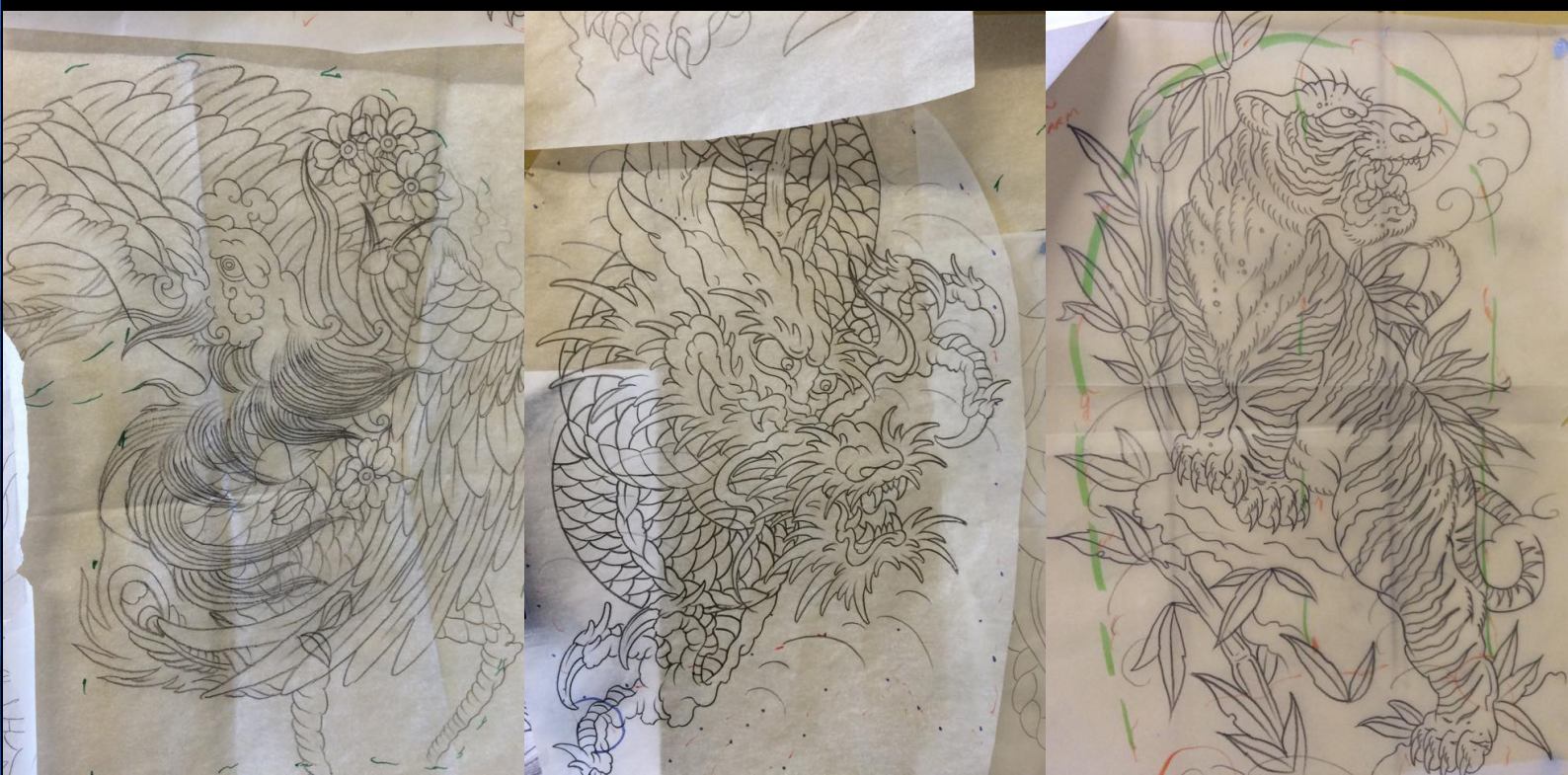
I don't really pay much attention to what goes on over here. It's weird, I love tattooing but anything other than Japanese doesn't interest me. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate how good some of the work is but I try to just focus on the people who are killing it and that inspire me to become a better artist. I guess that's one bit of advice I'd give to anyone. It's extremely easy to get addicted to the negativity, gossip, etc in your industry or your life for that matter. There is plenty of it and it is just a distraction.





WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO JAPANESE ART?

I can't quite put a finger on exactly what made me want to do it, I guess it was a bunch of different things. I can remember seeing Filip Leus backpieces in magazines around the shop whenever Chris Crooks was doing his apprenticeship. I think that's the time when he began to be influenced by Filip's work. I can always remember Chris doing out these amazing Japanese A3 drawings shaded in just a biro pen. I really loved the stuff he was doing back then & I think that was what really drew me to Japanese art. I just always loved that look and knowing there was so much you could do with it. I don't think any style of tattoo compares to it. It's only really now that I fully appreciate how good those guys who I first saw are. I remember from no age looking at those pieces in the magazines and thinking 'someday, I could do that'. Of course, I know fine well now it isn't just as easy as it looks!

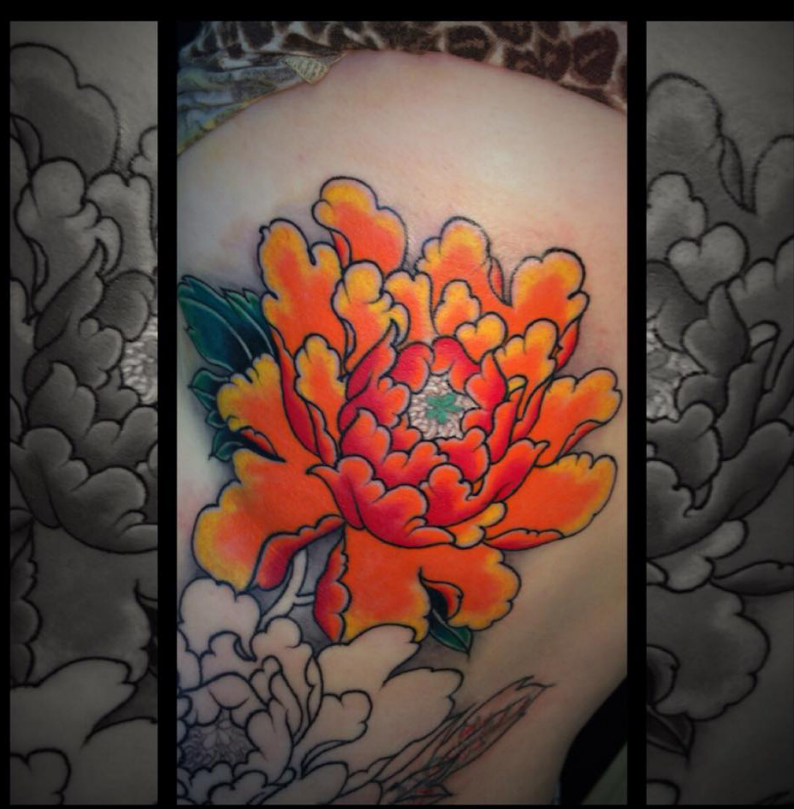


WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO FOCUS EXCLUSIVELY ON JAPANESE STYLE TATTOOING?

Once I began my apprenticeship I knew what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go with it. Although my Dad was making me do everything that come in through the door I knew it was only a matter of time before I could start perusing doing solely Japanese Style. I started off doing drawings, putting them up on the wall & hoping someone would like it.

It took a lot of persuading and sometimes working for free just to show people what I could do. I remember watching a Will Smith interview where he said something along the lines of 'don't do it for the love of money but do it for the love of what you're doing and the money will take care of itself'. That always stuck with me and slowly but surely more and more people knew the work I was doing and I began to brand myself as specializing in just Japanese Style tattooing.

I believe as an artist you have to see yourself as a brand if you want to pursue whatever style of work you want to do. It has taken a while but long and behold almost 4 years later I'm doing what I love which is Japanese day in day out and I hope to never see another tribal again haha!



WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED EQUIPMENT FOR TATTOOING? HAVE YOU GOT ANY TATTOOING SUPERSTITIONS?

I've found this to be another tough side of tattooing. Although my Dad has been around for a while and knows what works well for him, I think that what can work well for one person may not work well for another. Trying to find a machine that runs & works well, finding out what inks are tough to use and which inks heal well. Also trying to find needles that you prefer using or the positioning of your workstation all comes into play.

All these little things take time to get comfortable with, having confidence in what you're doing and how it will turn out is a big thing for anyone putting something onto someone for the rest of their life.

Thankfully I'm at a stage now where I have found what I like to use and know what works best for me. I have used the same liner which is a Micky Sharpz ever since I started tattooing at 16. I've tried a few different shaders and I always ended up reverting back to what I started off with which was the Micky Sharpz.

I used to have bother with my hands with the coil machine being heavier than a rotary but I've recently took up Cross-fit and have found any pain or discomfort related my hands or back has gone.

I've recently got two new chairs to help with my posture, an iPad mounted to my workstation for reference and better lighting. All these small adjustments can have a good impact on the quality of your work.



HAVE YOU A FAVORITE PIECE IN YOUR PORTFOLIO?

Some might think I'm insane, others might know where I'm coming from on this one. I think the tattoo itself is only half of it and people who do custom work will know this. I spend a ridiculous and I mean, a ridiculous amount of hours preparing for most of my work. Many hours of looking at reference, composition, detail, how it's going to flow, colour, everything. I would then tattoo it, take a picture & then I would analyze every last detail, comparing to the ones that inspire me & looking at what I could have done better.

I never seem to like anything that I do. I have what could you call it? A critical eye? I used to beat myself up over everything and even to this day struggle with it but I'm learning to accept that development doesn't come over night, that you can learn from failure just as much as success and the quality I'm striving for will take time.

THIS YEARS N.I. TATTOO CONVENTION WAS YOUR FIRST, HOW DID YOU FIND IT? ANY MEMORABLE MOMENTS?

It was! Although I hate it, I guess looking so young and tattooing played into my hands, it's always something I've wanted to do so I took the plunge and I don't think it could have went any better! Being amongst my Dad, my clients, meeting new people and fellow artists was great but without a doubt the highlight of the weekend was the winner of 'the best Japanese award', Alessandro Pellegrini coming into the booth and looking over my shoulder complimenting my work. It's a great encouragement having people you look up to taking an interest in your work.



WHO HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOU AS AN ARTIST?

There are many influences, my Dad and his old school principles. Mike Rubendall, just everything about the guy. Shige, his attention to detail and composition. Filip Leu, being the nicest and happiest guy of all time. They have all influenced me greatly but I think you just have to look at my work to know without a doubt Chris Crooks has been my biggest influence so far. With him doing his apprenticeship at the shop I had always seen his drawings and some of the work he was doing at the time.

I remember from no age always looking to get a tattoo by him. Just before my 18th I went down & arranged to start my first tattoo by him, a sleeve 'Shoki'. I was already tattooing a year and a half at this stage. I remember reading an interview by Shige saying the best way to learn about tattooing is by getting one. He wasn't far wrong, getting the sleeve just changed everything for me. I learnt so much over those few sessions of tattooing. Everything from how you talk to your clients to composition to detail to colour, everything. Even till this day I'm still learning from him. He has been like a mentor to me in a way, telling me what I should use, what I should have done different, what I could do better.

Coming from the same town, school, shop, he has gave me the belief & shown me that there is no limit to what a young nobody from Portadown can do with a huge desire to achieve great things and for that I'm very grateful.





ARE THERE ANY LOCAL ARTISTS WHO REALLY STAND OUT FOR YOU?

Chris Crooks, Willy G, Craig Kelly & Gigi McQueen are the 4 that stand out for me. Their work is always progressing and they've really set the standard in Northern Ireland for their style of work.

This is why I'm in no rush to get another tattoo. There are artists that just seem to come out of nowhere and produce amazing work. I'm looking forward to seeing if there will be anyone else that will do the same. Any plans or ambitions for the future?

At the start of the year I set a few goals for myself. Getting my work into a magazine, doing not just a tattoo convention but the best tattoo convention in Northern Ireland, having someone fly in from another country to get a piece by me, doing an interview.

Just some things to look back on at the end of the year knowing you gave it your all and it gives you some incentive to go on to do bigger things. Overall I just want to improve from week to week and see how far I can go. Learning that it's not so much about the destination but the process is a big thing for me.

Once I finish a piece I'm never satisfied and I can't wait to get onto the next one, I'm always striving for more. I'm very blessed to have the platform to do that with great people around me and I'm ready to do whatever it takes to be a success.

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Artist: DC
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Artist: Mike Ferris
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Artist: Snoopy
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Artist: Ritchie Connor
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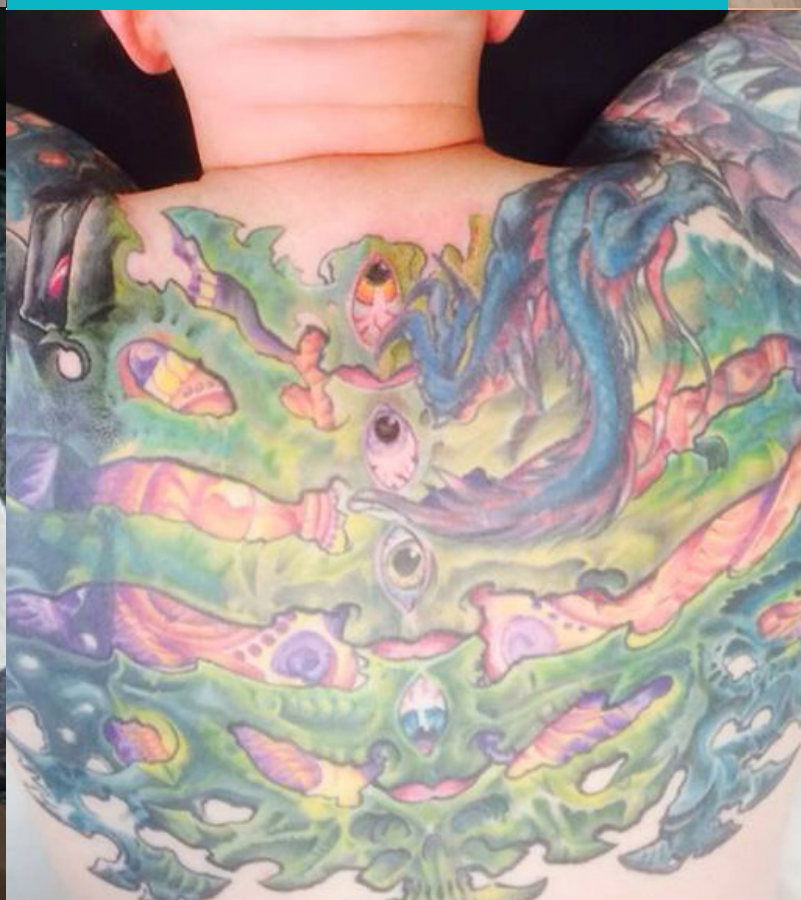
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