

Tattoos N.I.

KEEP 'ER LIT... KEEP 'ER LOCAL

DESIGNS

ARTISTS **FEATURES**

JOHN MURPHY

“Would you not rather be a interior designer or a fashion designer you know you can have a real career that way”



MARK THOMPSON

“It was a very hard decision to make and I’ll be sad leaving where I am because I was happy there, but when the chance comes up to do things your own way and to do the work you want to do, it’s a hard one to turn down. So I’m setting up Black Arrow Tattoo Studio...”

FLASH **STORIES** ADVERTS
STUDIOS

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11 - 18:

Tattoos NI at the 2nd Titanic International Tattoo Convention.

WELCOME

Welcome to our September Issue! This month, we have two very different stories. Mark Thompson talks to us about his time at Artistic Tattoo and what the future holds as he branches out into his own studio. John Murphy talks to us about the long struggles of apprenticeship, and how dedication, perserverance and a cheeky accent helped along the way!

The design pages are full of more amazing and recent work from our Northern Irish artists and give plenty to inspire you towards your next inking. 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.

We've got some amazing offers on Merch over on our website - every penny raised goes straight into the Northern Irish tattoo scene, whether to fund our next competition or to support conventions, artists and studios provincewide. We are partnered with Pretty in Pink Breast Cancer Charity and donate all surplus fundraising directly to them (with over £100 raised this year alone, thank you from the bottom of our hearts!)

We are looking for contributors to our next issue - whether you are an artist or a client, send your tattoo stories into us with a picture and you can be featured! Send me an email, details at the bottom of the page and I am looking forward to reading them all!

Until next time, keep 'er lit and keep 'er local.

Peace,

Kezzy

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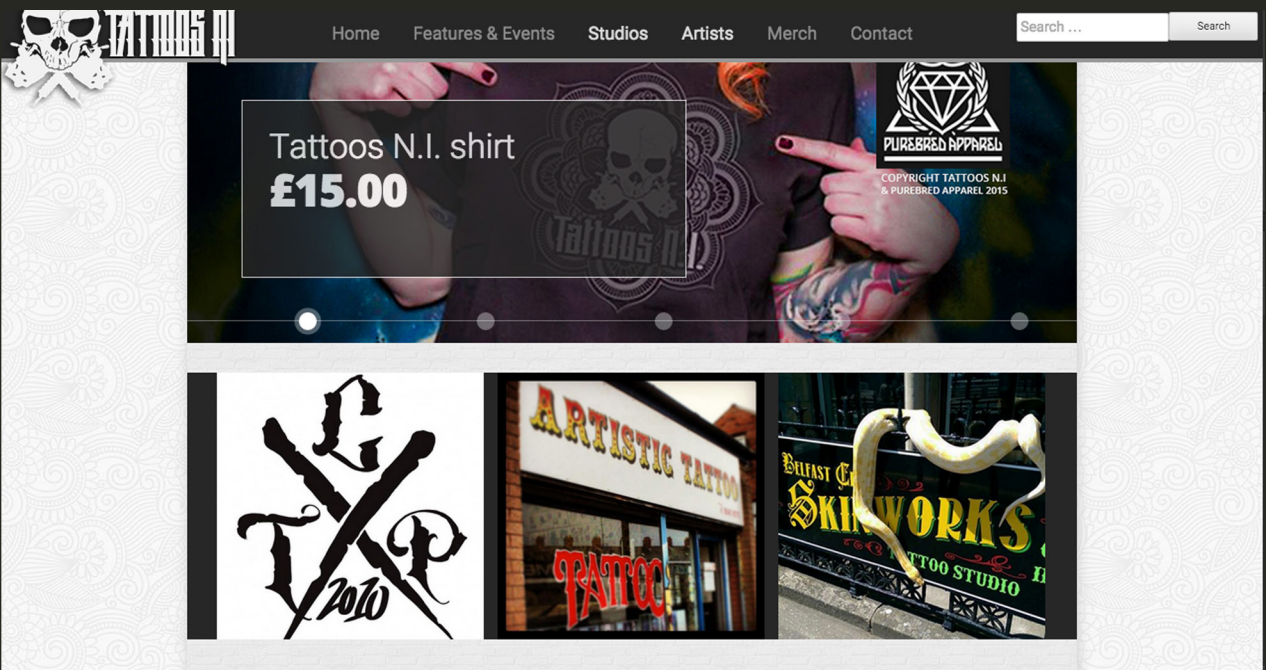
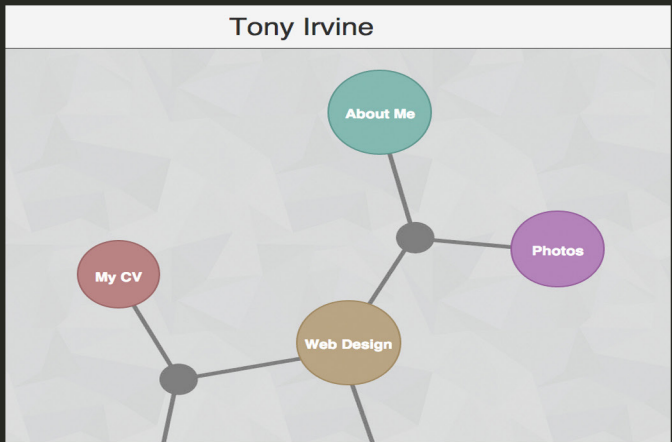
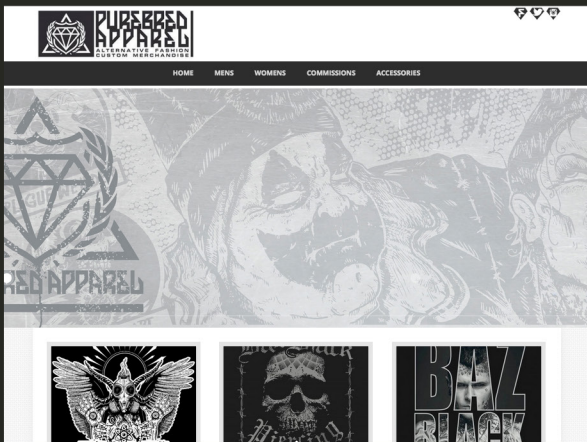
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MARK THOMPSON



Mark Thompson currently working at Aritstic Tattoo Studio Belfast. He is branching out and opening up Black Arrow Tattoo Studio.

Words by Melanie Brehaut

Hi Mark. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into tattooing?

Hey. Yeah well I've been tattooing just over 7 years now, and about the last 2.5 of those years I've spent working out of Artistic Tattoo in East Belfast. My interest in tattoos started when I was a teenager and when I turned 18, I started getting a few small tattoos. At that point I never even dreamt of learning how to tattoo. After school, I studied Art and Design for 3 years, but never really applied myself because I was too busy messing about and getting into trouble which is a shame really, because that's when I had my first opportunity to do an apprenticeship but never took it. I didn't take it because back then I certainly didn't appreciate tattoos and never seen them as anything artistic. All I had ever seen were the old school, traditional faded tattoos my dad had and of course bloody tribal that everyone seemed to be getting back then, and to me that was shit. Anyway, a few years after that, I was watching my friend get tattooed in a studio and thought to myself "yeah I would like to do that". Very quickly, tattooing became my passion. As cliché as it sounds, but all I thought about was tattooing 24/7 and it's been that way ever since. I started getting more tattoos, reading everything I could on tattooing, and started hanging about with some tattooists I got to know. Although I never had a formal apprenticeship under them, they did advise me and guide me a lot. Eventually, I landed myself a weekend job tattooing at a small shop 40 minutes away from where I live and that was the small stepping stone for me to move into the professional tattoo industry.





Pete Bonner is a bit of a legend in NI. How did you come to be working with him?

That's exactly what he is. I got my first ever tattoo in Artistic Tattoo and I've been getting tattooed by Pete ever since. For years Artistic Tattoo has had a good reputation for putting out great quality tattoos. I had a pretty high pressured 9am - 5pm job and I used to sit and dream about working at Artistic. I suppose one thing I've got going for me is that I have unwavering focus and determination.

When I decided I wanted to become a tattooist, my long term goal was to work at Artistic Tattoo. My wife will tell you that I used to tell her that one day I would work there with Pete. One day I plucked up the courage, went into the shop and was like 'Hey Pete, here's what I've been doing since we last spoke, here's my portfolio, blah blah blah.....' and after looking through my work he said it was good but needed to improve and I could start off by coming into the shop at the weekends. For the next 10 months, I worked at my full time job Monday to Thursday, shadowed Pete in the shop Friday and Saturday and tattooed on Sundays. After that, I became a full time resident artist.

What would you say you've learned from him?

How many pages does this magazine have? Hahaha! I've honestly learned so much from him that it's hard to quantify. Put it like this, if Pete hadn't have invested the energy he did then I would never have been able to break into the Northern Ireland professional tattoo industry or reach the standard I'm at today. He's a great friend and will always have my utmost respect and gratitude.

And now you're opening a shop yourself. What made you decide to head out on your own?

Yeah, I'm fleeing the nest hahaha!! It was a very hard decision to make and I'll be sad leaving where I am because I was happy there, but when the chance comes up to do things your own way and to do the work you want to do, it's a hard one to turn down. So I'm setting up Black Arrow Tattoo Studio which will be a small, private setting located at the junction of the Holywood Road and Circular Road in East Belfast. Once I get settled into my new place, I will be working more local and international conventions in the next couple of years and getting my work out there. Exciting times ahead.

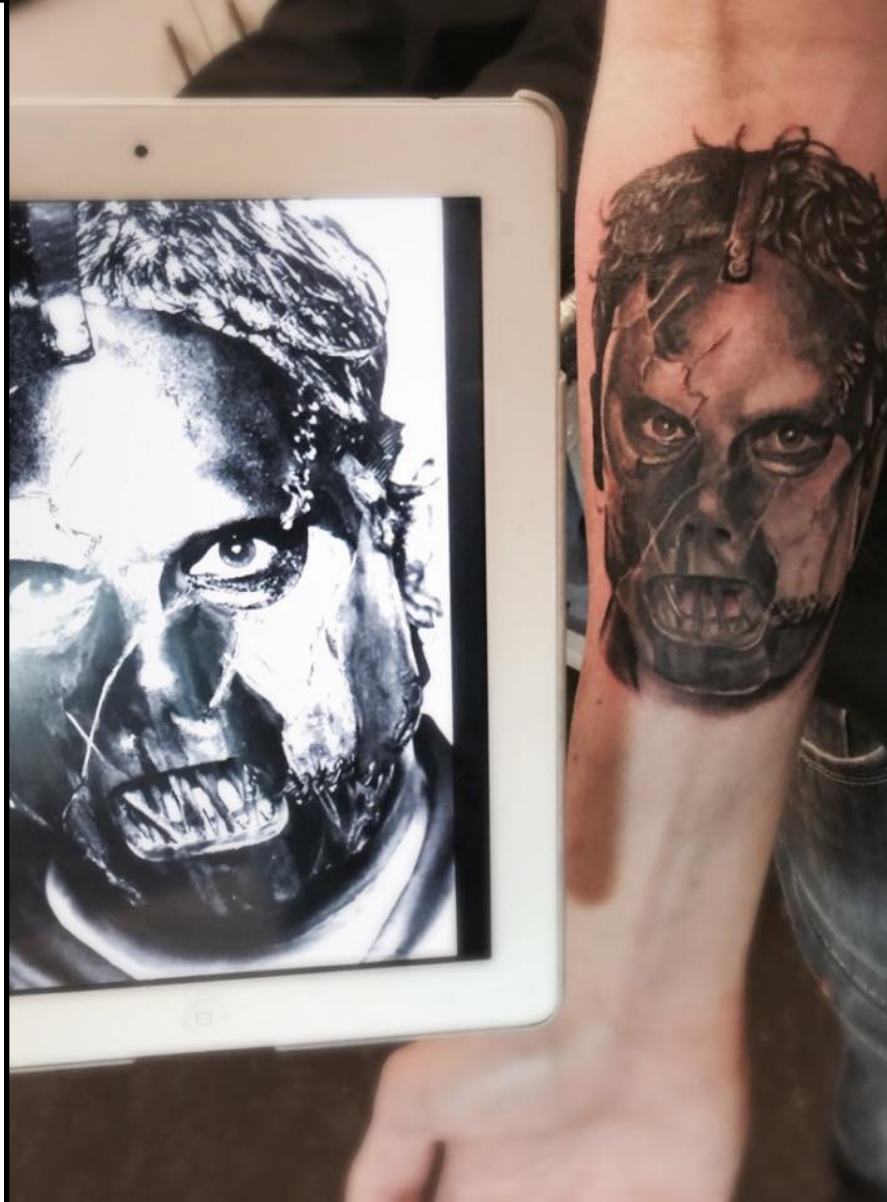


Let's talk about your work. Do you have a favourite style of tattooing?

As long as the design or the concept interests me I'll tattoo in any style, but the style I love to tattoo the most is black and grey realism. I'm wanting to build on my portraits once I get Black Arrow up and running and become one of Northern Ireland's leading artists in that style. But it is refreshing to work in different styles. I think that keeps the creative juices flowing.

What would you say that's your signature style, or would you consider yourself more of an all rounder?

At this moment in time I wouldn't say I have a signature style as such although I do always try and put as much detail into my work as I can. Even as a kid, my drawings and artwork would always have a strong element of realism in them and that's stayed with me right up through my tattooing. This is obviously why I would be drawn to the realism style. It actually took me quite a while to feel comfortable designing and tattooing old school, traditional style tattoos for example. They are very bold and basic and because my natural thought process is to add as much detail to designs as I can, this style took a bit more focus for me. But I feel my background as a street shop tattooist gives me a good foundation as a competent tattoo artist because I've drawn and tattooed so many different styles. Now I'm in my own shop doing my own thing, I'm hoping my own signature style starts to develop itself organically.





Is there anything you won't tattoo?

I'm not too fussed on tattooing hands, although occasionally I will if I feel that my client is already heavily tattooed and has committed to that lifestyle and understands there maybe consequences to having such visible tattoos. And the face..... No exceptions on that one. I think that sometimes peoples desire to have blatantly visible tattoos as a fashion statement or status indicator, clouds their better judgment and stops them thinking about how much these visible tattoos may effect their lives in the future. It may effect someones chances of getting a job for example. As far as the design goes, i'm pretty open minded.

What do you think of the local tattoo scene these days?

Looking at tattoo artists, I think we have some fantastic talent here in Northern Ireland. Artists like Chris Crooks, Dean McLaughlin, Chris Hill, Brian Tipping, Willy G, Alan Hinds are constantly putting out awesome pieces of work and helping put Northern Ireland on the map for quality tattooing. And it's also great to see that the 'old bloods' like Pete Bonner, Pert, Johnny Venus for example are still going strong in the industry today. As for clients, I feel that people are starting to take the art more seriously and some of my favourite custom tattoos that I've done and seen have come from the clients own idea. More and more people are starting to realise that good quality tattoos come from good quality artists.



Any funny stories you can share? Bad clients, silly tattoos, etc?

Umm.....Probably the most ridiculous story I have is that a while ago this guy came into the shop to get his first tattoo. He choose a piece of flash off the wall that had some script on it. The tattoo took me 2 hours to complete and the guy left really pleased with the finished result. He then came back in the next day to get his second tattoo which was some more script down the inside of his forearm. I asked him if he was still happy with his tattoo from the previous day and he said that he was still happy with it. In the next breath he told me that there actually was something he wasn't really happy with..... The fact that I tattooed the writing back to front!! Obviously I knew he was wrong as theres no way on earth I would've tattooed letters and words back to front....



But he was adamant that everything was back to front and when he showed me the tattoo again I told him it was perfectly fine. You may see where I'm going with this one!! He then walked over and looked at his tattoo in the mirror then turned to me and said "It is back to front, see!?!". At first I laughed and thought he was winding me up, but no no, he was deadly serious. After a moment of silence, I just kept repeating "Think about what you're telling me here.... you're tattoo is back to front when you look in the mirror!?!". After a couple of minutes, the penny dropped and I've never seen anyone look so embarrassed. I don't know what was more ridiculous though, the fact he couldn't work out that his tattoo was back to front in a mirror or that he even came back to get more writing tattooed the very next day believing that I had messed up his first one!!

And what do you think of tattooing in general in 2015? There are now multiple TV shows about it and more of an acceptance of body art and modifications. Do you think that's a good thing?

I'm personally not a fan of these programs, but I can see why the general public would like them. There's no doubting that tattoos are a big part of mainstream society nowadays and I believe these TV programs have a big part to play in the rise in popularity of tattoos, so in that sense maybe they're good. But it is a double edged sword. On one hand, some of these programs portray tattoos in a very positive light to the public. They can allow the viewer to see a variety of eye pleasing tattoos in all styles, shapes, sizes, placements etc, and maybe encourage someone into getting tattooed who would never have dreamed of it before. Or at the very least, they may give the viewer a new found appreciation and acceptance of tattoos even if they still wouldn't get one themselves. On the other hand I feel that they can be damaging as they encourage a rise in the popularity of illegal tattooers (or scratchers) which do harm to the tattooing industry and take away from the good quality work that is being done out there.





Finally, what would be your advice to someone trying to get into working as a tattooist?

Here's the harsh reality. First and foremost, it's not like the programs you see on TV. Yes it's a great job but its more than that, its a lifestyle. You have to be dedicated and prepared to work every minute needed to get to where you want to be and those minutes can amount to years. If you need to sacrifice to get there, then that's what you need to do. There's no short cuts or compromise on that. When Pete first took me under his wing, I worked six and a half days a week, with a wife, a toddler and a new born at home. Two and a half of those days I didn't get paid for.

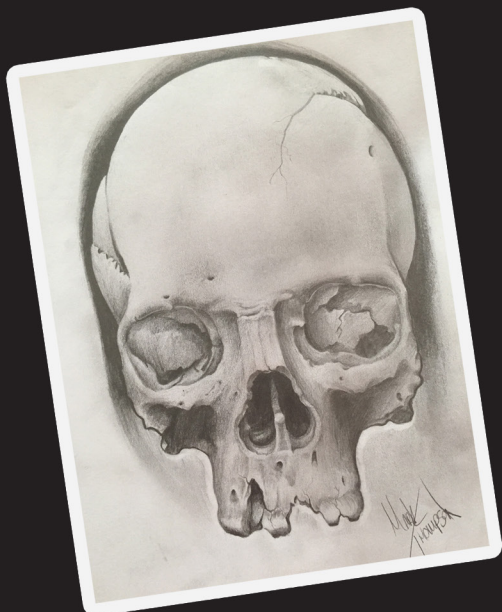
I worked a full time job and apprenticed at his shop without any idea how long that would last, but it turned out to be 10 months. My family time and social life suffered greatly, but I was lucky to have such a great wife who understood that's how it had to be. The industry is very, very competitive and already saturated with tattooists both good and bad and with Northern Ireland not being the biggest place on earth the ratio of clients to tattooers is getting smaller all the time. If you do make it in the industry, not every tattoo that comes through the door is gonna be a tattoo that you particularly want to do or interests you, but you still have to make it the best tattoo you can. Most importantly, don't over look the pressure and responsibility that comes with putting a good permanent tattoo on someone for the rest of their lives. After taking all this on board, if you do decide you still want to become a tattooist, go get an apprenticeship in a shop and be patient. It may not happen for you right away, but if you want it bad enough you'll get there some day.



BLACK ARROW

Custom Tattoos

BY MARK THOMPSON



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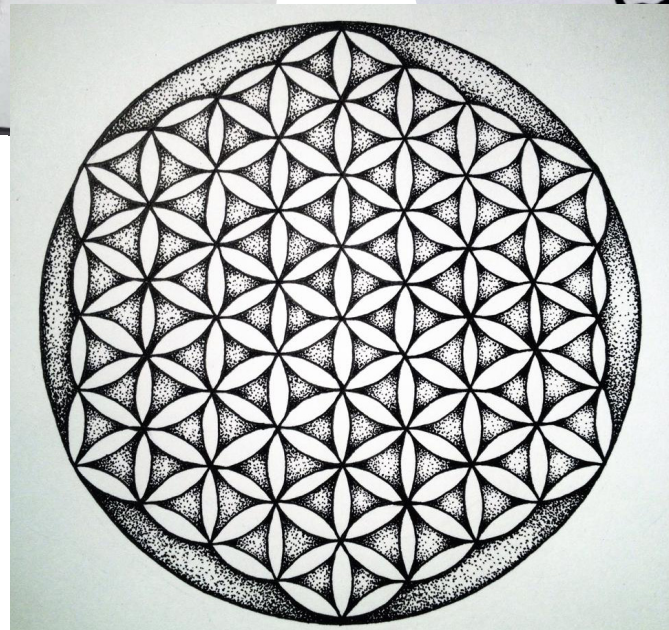
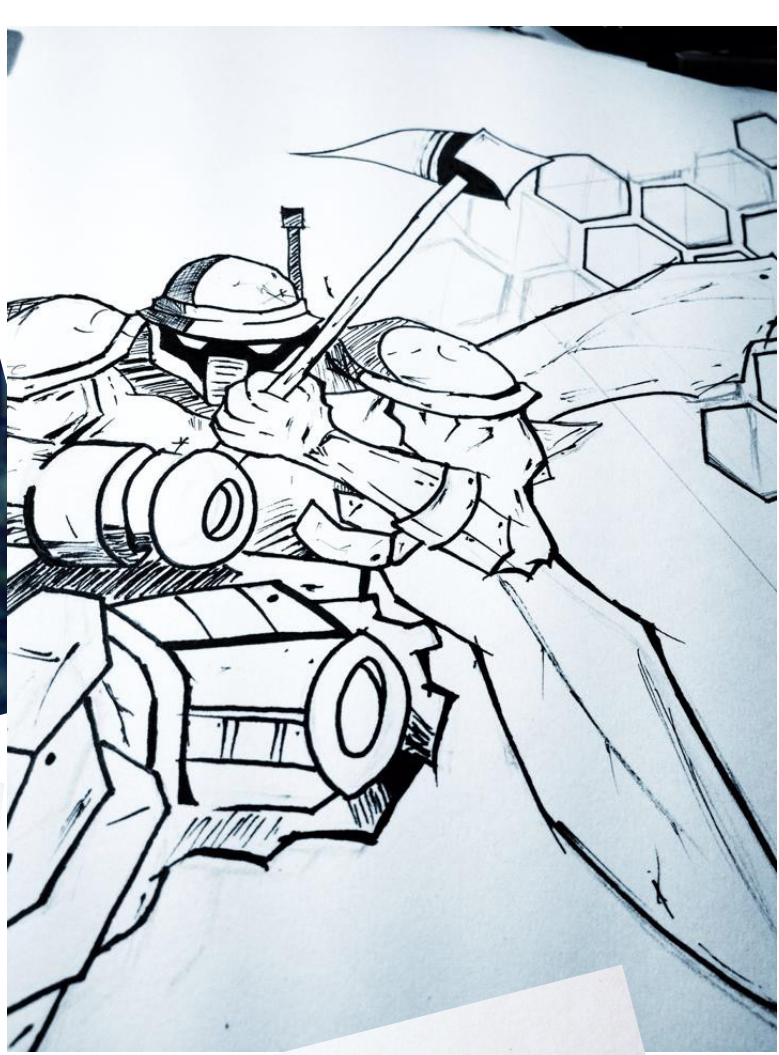
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JOHN MURPHY



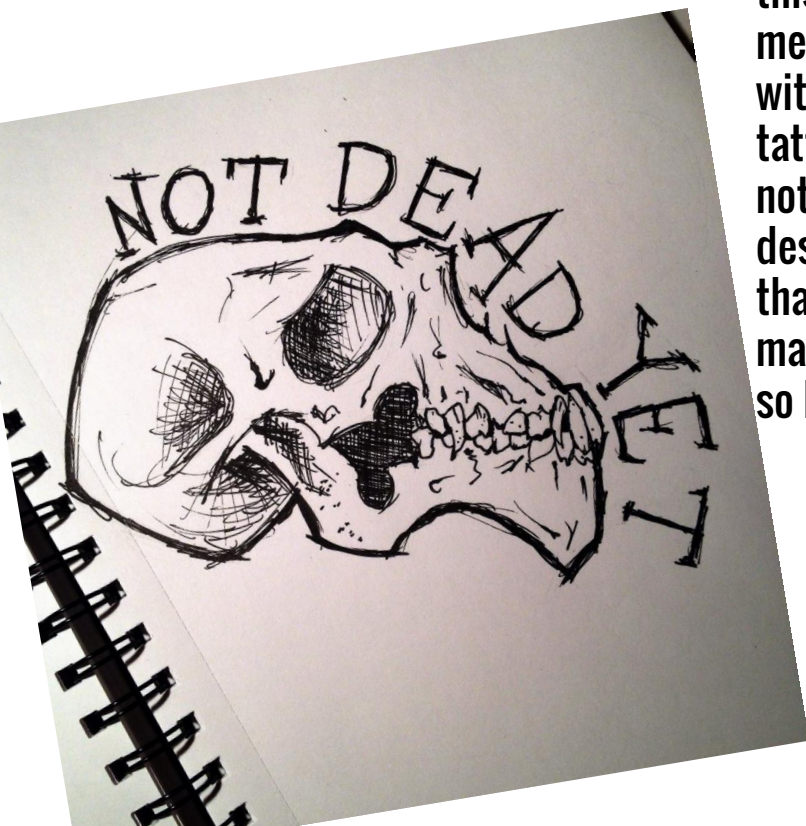
Introducing John Murphy. John is an apprentice working out of Primal Ink Tattoo Studio, Armagh. This is John's story on his move from Waterford to Armagh.



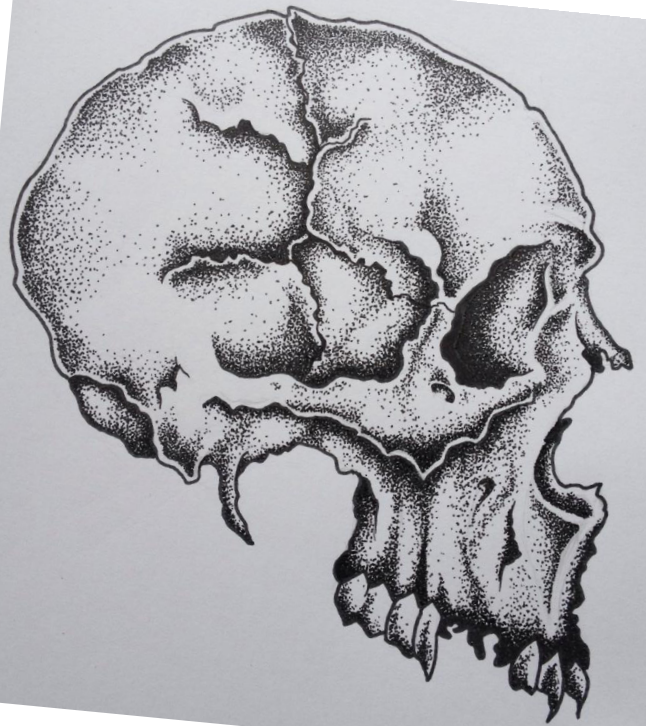
Now this is a story all about how my life got flipped turned upside down and I'd like to take a minute just sit right here and tell you all about how I came to primal ink. I was always a pretty artistic/ creative kid loved making things and drawing or painting never a dull moment when you make your own fun I guess ha-ha.



I was always a kid that didn't really do fuck all in school other than get in stupid sorts of trouble, mostly because I hated everything about it until I started to draw some stuff and was actually good at it! (ha-ha). I used to go to the art class and just stay in there all day instead of going to maths classes or geography. I always thought I didn't really need to know where to find the value of X or what rocks I was standing on and to this day those questions still don't really bother me ha-ha. It was always fun when I had meetings with my principals that always asked if being a tattooist was really the job I wanted "would you not rather be a interior designer or a fashion designer, you know you can have a real career that way". This was literally the sentence that made me like I'm going to prove this idiot wrong so I guess I should thank them.



From there on out, I was tattoo mad, literally any conversation I had ended up being about tattoos and artist work until I went to art college in Waterford and finally met some like minded and really awesome people. Creating every day was amazing and made me so happy. I used to stay back late everyday just to have the studio to myself and be left alone to create - unfortunately the course I was doing was just a foundation course for one year before heading away to "real" art college for a degree. Everyone was excited about heading off and getting into their desired colleges until we all got our acceptance letters.

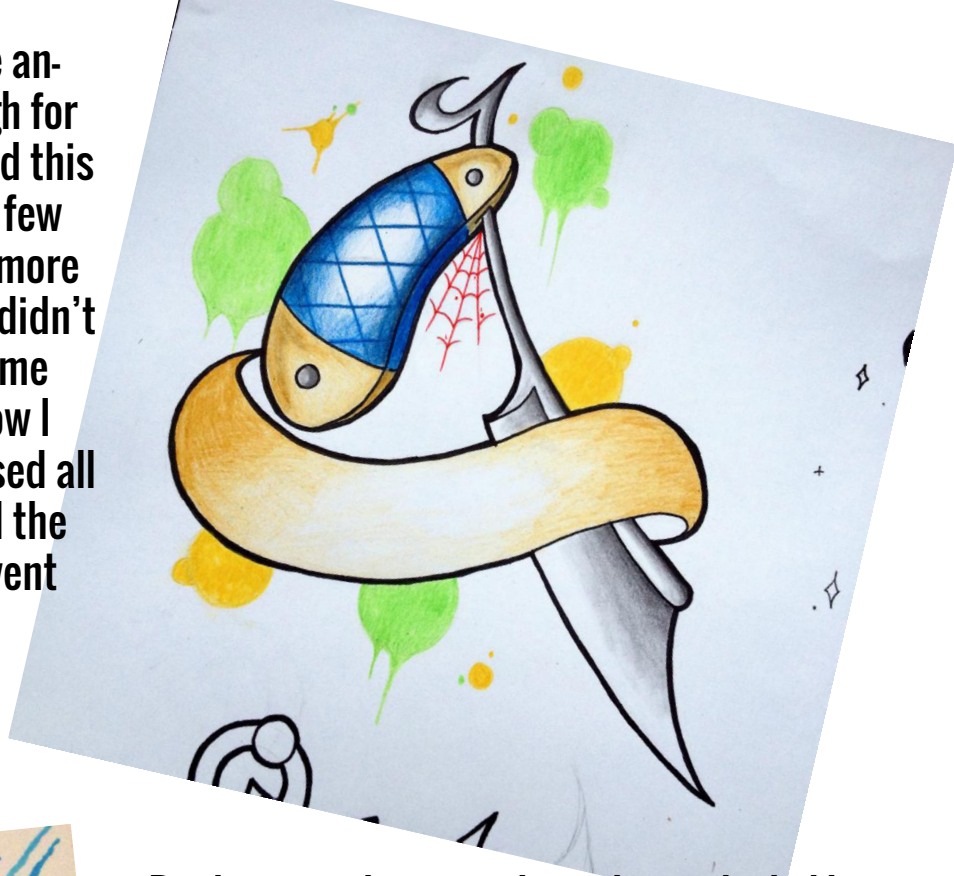


I remember the day I got mine, the day after both of my friends had got their letters and both of them done amazing and got in. They were both at either side of me when I opened mine. Where it had said you received 290 points, unfortunately I needed so many more just to get in. I just brushed it off as if I didn't care like meh fuck it it's all good I'll find something to do for a year. It's a great feeling, a number telling you you aren't good enough to do literally the only thing you want to do. I ended up going back to another one year course in hand drawn animation and that was awesome!

But unfortunately for me it costs money to live and my dad got me a job working on building sites, mainly renovations of pure and utter dirt holes that were better off knocked down but hey a job's a job. And you know those jobs you just don't fit into and instantly hate? This was one of those. I didn't really like the risks of falling off a roof or cutting a finger off for some building I literally wanted to burn down that was most definitely my lowest point.



I used to hate waking up, I'd go home angry, forgot how it felt to actually laugh for a little while. One site I worked on had this wall that was on the way down and a few mornings that wall looked more and more friendly for me to drive into just so I didn't have to go do that shit that day. Call me dramatic but that is quite literally how I felt. I was a 20 year old guy that missed all his friends away in college and hated the moment I woke up to the moment I went back to sleep.

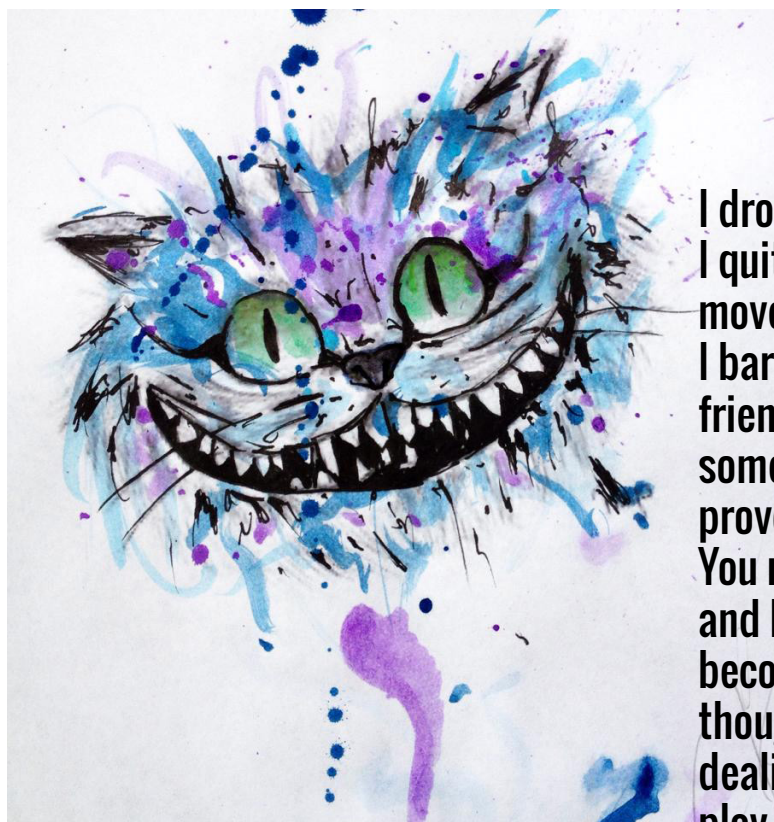


Don't worry the story does change ha-ha! I went around with my portfolio to different tattoo shops trying to get out of this damn job and to no avail. A couple of places showed some interest but nothing special. From there I was willing to try any job to get away from it and on one of this jobs I had the opportunity to try alternative modelling. To say I was stupidly nervous was an understatement! I mean, I was a builder not a guy meant to be in front of a camera ha-ha but at my first photo shoot I was chatting with all the models and that's when I met Ritchie from primal ink. He was also a really nervous dude so our solution was to drink rum it helped a lot ha-ha.

I told him I wanted to be a tattooist and stuff, I showed him my art and we ended up on the beer for the night. I made a friend for life that night. From there on out I plagued the dude with messages about the industry, what he was tattooing every day until we had another photo shoot together. He gave me this little teeny tiny tattoo that said "NOT DEAD YET", the only tattoo that ever really meant anything to me, reminding me every day that my dream of tattooing wasn't dead and neither was I.



I booked in to get tattooed by Ritchie at the ho ho ho tattoo show in Cork and I asked him if I could possibly come up and just work for a week, just to get the experience of working for him and tattoo myself at the end of it all. He said yes and ooooooh man I got teary eyed and all finally I was getting a chance to show a little taste of what I can do. I came up, worked away for the week and in true primal ink style the first tattoo was done not on fake skin, not on pig skin but on myself - an anarchy symbol. I did the whole thing with a round shader and I was soooo god damn proud of it ha-ha. I was happy heading back home, more confident in my ability when I got a message from Ritchie saying I've got the heart of a tattooist and he offered to let me work in primal ink with him and Aaron for the three months of the summer. He knew it was a huge ask for me to move from Kilkenny way way down south all the way to Armagh but I replied with I'd love to and I don't want to say but so I won't but I'll be there as soon as I can.



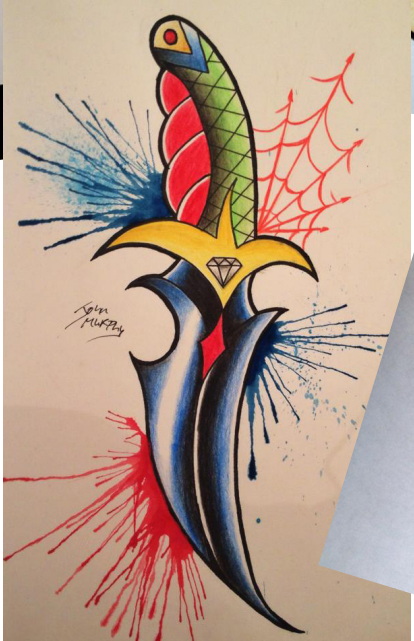
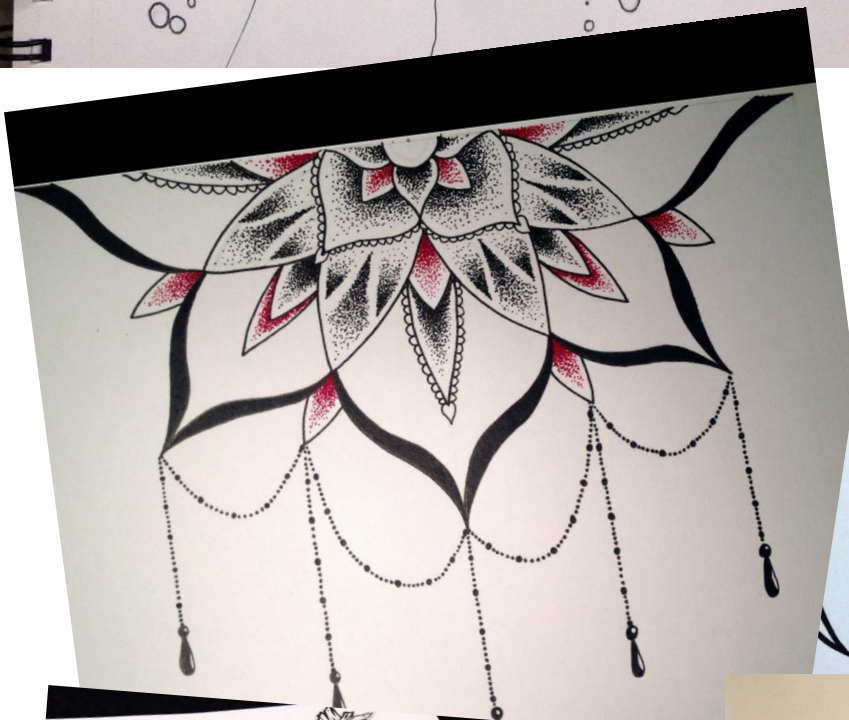
I dropped everything for the next three months. I quit my job, dropped friends, left everyone and moved on up here and moved in with Aaron, a dude I barely knew that's now become one of my best friends ha-ha. We went to work - this job isn't something you get like normal job, you have to prove yourself and how much you really want it. You really have to wear your heart on your sleeve and Ritchie gave me the talk and said this has to become everything, literally eat sleep breathe the thought of tattooing some day. I loved it so much, dealing with customers is awesome - a new idea to play with, with literally everyone that walks in the door being awesome.

Learning to strip down and set up properly, stencilling tattoo designs, emptying the bins, washing floors, cleaning everything, running around and doing what ever needs to be done and of course opening the shutters every morning was awesome! Every now and again a customer would ask about me because they heard my obvious southern accent and Ritchie always told them my story and added he's just up for the summer. After a while he stopped adding that in and then one time he told a customer the story of how I came to be and added "now he's not leaving".



Over hearing that was awesome, it gave me the confidence to actually ask if I could stay and now here I am, I'm the design artist here at primal ink tattoo studio. Don't worry, I'll eventually tattoo and anyone that wants to get tattooed by me will literally get the best work I can possibly ever give! So come on down to us, grab a chat with Ritchie Aaron or myself and we will get you sorted . primal ink for life brother \m/ "NOT DEAD YET"

Thanks for reading, and thanks to the guys at Tattoos NI for letting me share my story. It aint over yet.





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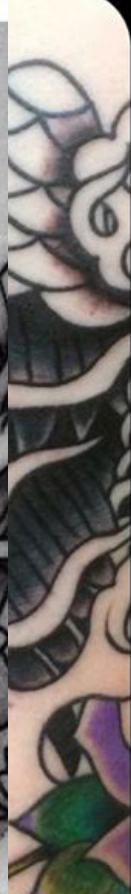
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