



OPPOSITE: Tomas Tomas
 photographed by P-Mod for
Rise Magazine, February 2014
 Tomas Tomas's neo-tribal tattoos
 were carried out by various artists
 at the Into You studio.

Born in 1974, Tomas had his start in Manchester and worked for a time with Bugs in Camden. In 2003 he joined Into You, and, like Moore, Herring and LeHead, offered an individualized take on the bold graphic style Binnie had inspired.

Thomas Hooper joined next. He had learned to tattoo between 1999 and 2000 under the tutelage of Into You alumnus Jim MacAirt, who instilled in him the need to bring something unique to the trade. While with MacAirt, Hooper became aware of Binnie and Moore, gradually coming to understand Into You and following LeHead and Tomas. In the mid 2000s Hooper found his stride in mixing tribal and organic geometries, influenced in part by Binnie's notions of space, texture and depth.

While certainly not singular in its style (Into You was also, over the years, home to London's elite Japanese-style tattooers, Jason Saga and Ian Flower), the shop's connection to what's become known, broadly, as blackwork is undeniable. From Binnie and Moore, and through Duncan X's experiments with immediate impact, the coterie surrounding Into You's legacy cements Binnie's initial intentions, even if unintentional, as irrefutably pioneering.

RIGHT: Into You shop interior
 All works by Alex Binnie.

RIGHT, CENTRE: 'Prick me Said Britney'
 Into You Christmas poster,
 c. 2000

A photograph of Binnie after he tattooed Britney Spears in 2000, on the wall of the studio.

RIGHT, BOTTOM: Alex Binnie
 tattooing in the shop, 2014

After Into You closed in October 2016, Binnie took some time off from tattooing. Currently, he's tattooing part-time at 1770 [p.242] in Brighton.



B. 1980 / Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

Main studio: La Flor Sagrada Tattoo, Melbourne, Australia

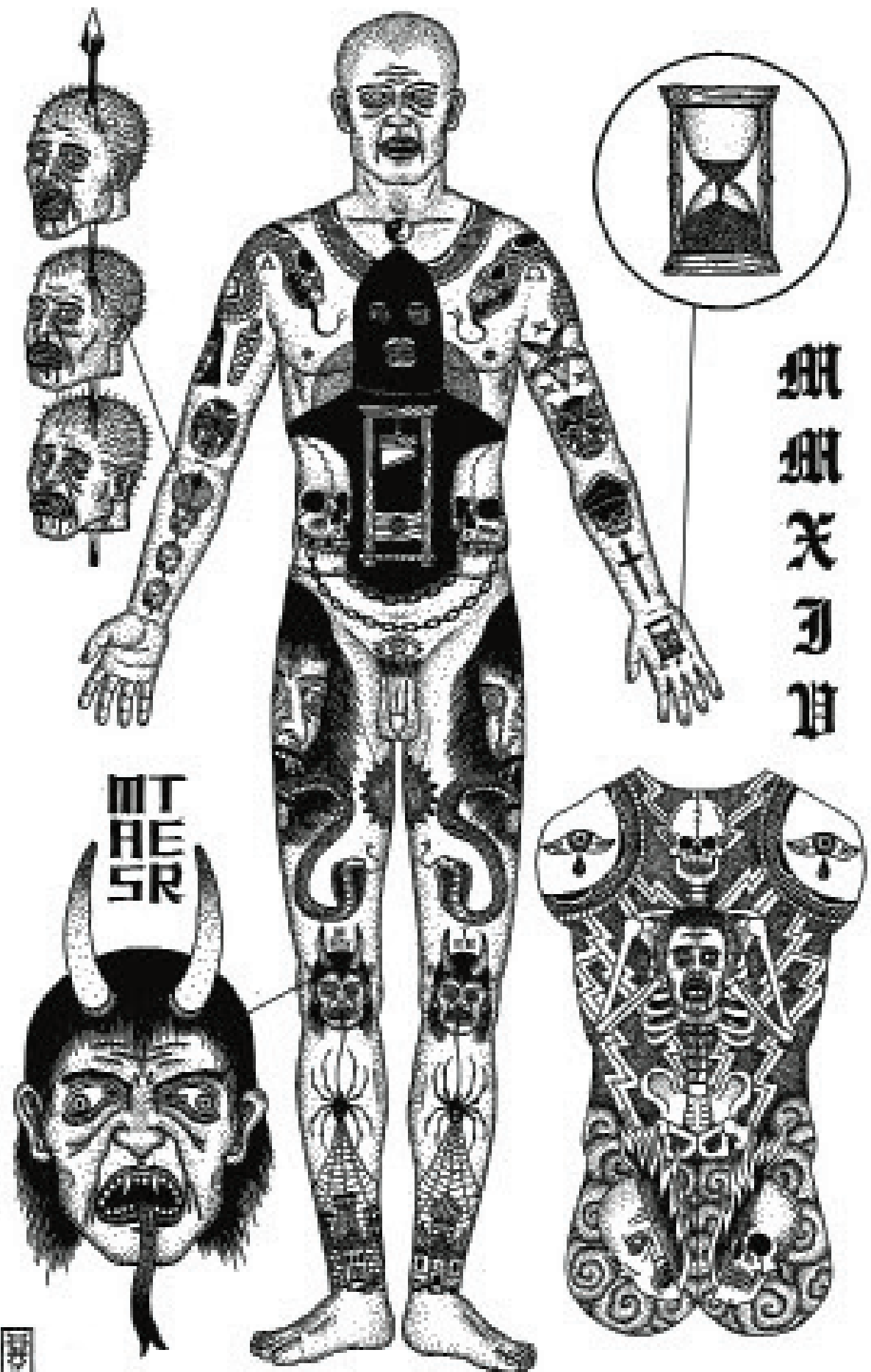
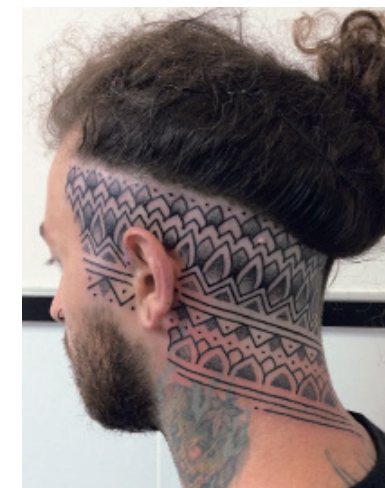
'A few years after I started tattooing, I discovered the main influence on my tattooing and it was a shop, Into You, London,' says Flores. His work, which mixes tribal, Tibetan and geometric styles, clearly exhibits the shop's influence on a generation of tattooers. However, his background in technical design and his childhood environment explain why Into You had such a big impact. 'I grew up in a city surrounded by amazing architecture – patterns everywhere,' he says.

Flores did his first tattoo on himself in 1998, followed by one on his brother. At that point, he'd been getting tattooed for three years and resolved to become a tattooer. Despite the decision, he didn't complete a formal apprenticeship: 'A good friend taught me how to make needles; it was a valuable thing to know, and I spent full days looking at tattoo magazines, trying to guess how to do things.'

Flores also travelled, getting tattooed by different artists, an experience that helped him 'to keep going and improving'. He first moved to Málaga, and then to Barcelona. 'After that I was moving from city to city. Since I started tattooing I've tried to travel to different places and countries, guesing in shops and doing as many conventions as possible. Travel was the number one key for establishing my career.'

In December 2009 Flores made his biggest leap, and moved to Australia. For two years he guested at shops across the country before taking residence at Korpus in Melbourne, where he solidified his style and established a more settled lifestyle. In 2017 he opened his own studio, La Flor Sagrada Tattoo, where he currently works.

Ultimately, though, it's tattooing he loves most: 'After all the years I learned not to worry as much about tattooing and where it is headed. I enjoy every piece I do, small or big. What I love the most is the mix of elements and making them form a nice composition and flow on the body.'



The Allure of Cholo-style Tattooing

B. J. Betts

The iconic Cholo style was always intriguing to me. Being from the East Coast, I always viewed it as an elusive style that was strictly West Coast. With our style of clothing, tattoos and culture, the Cholo aesthetic simply wasn't embraced in the early '80s, when I was first becoming interested in tattooing.

When I started, I was always drawn to lettering and typography. After my first trip to Los Angeles in the mid '80s, I wanted to know and see more. I was young, on the East Coast, and the only exposure to the Cholo style of art was through *Teen Angel's* and *Lowrider* magazines, and library books. Friends from California would pick up stuff and mail it to me as well.

The Cholo lettering and black-and-grey tattooing styles tell a distinct story. I can feel all the emotion that goes into the lettering and iconic imagery. All those images have a purpose, and can also be traced back to the prison system. The old Cholo and Chicano gangsters shared a lifestyle that you actually lived, not just read about. It was about repping your neighbourhood, your family name, and generally wanting to broadcast what you were all about.

With lettering, there are no accompanying pictures to tell the story, so the chosen font has to do that for you. When I see a beautifully done script name,

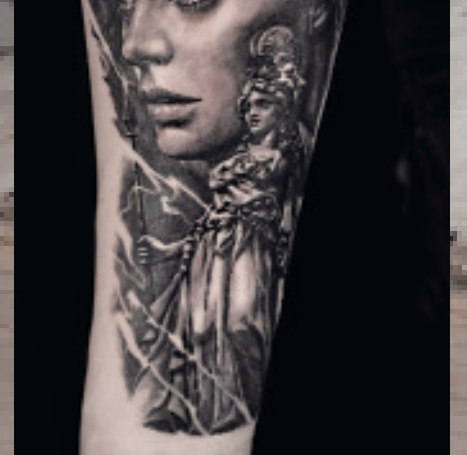
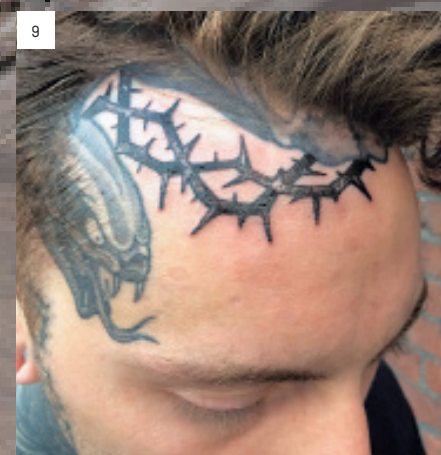
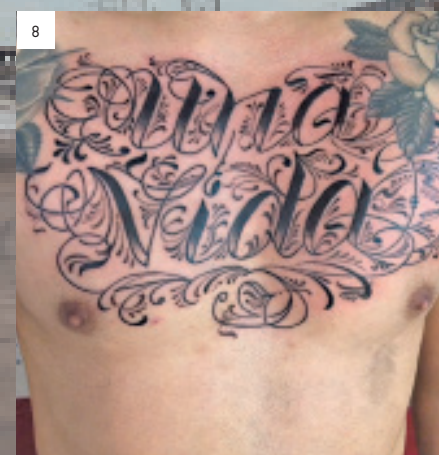
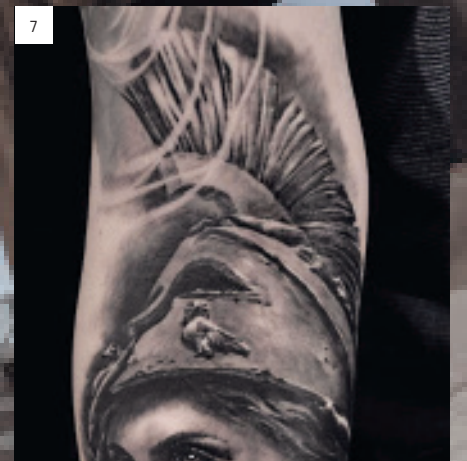
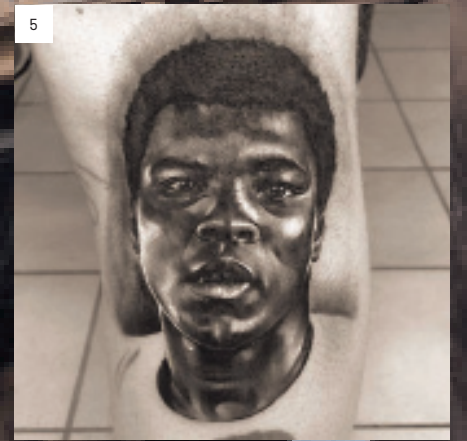
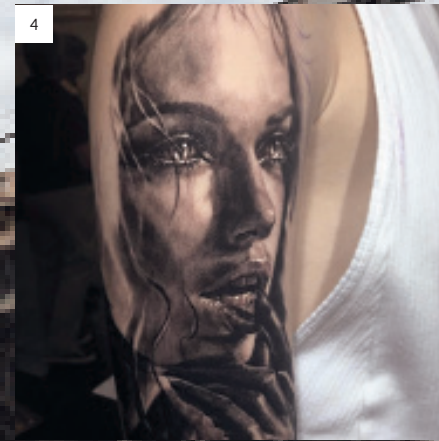
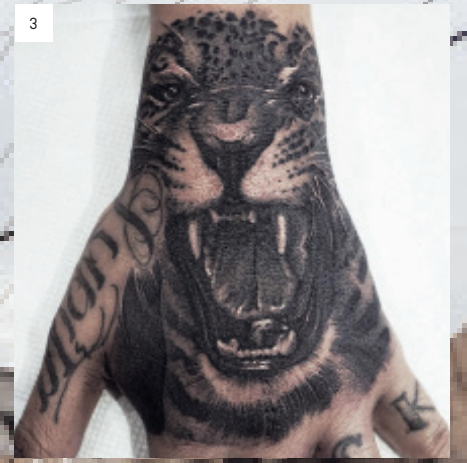
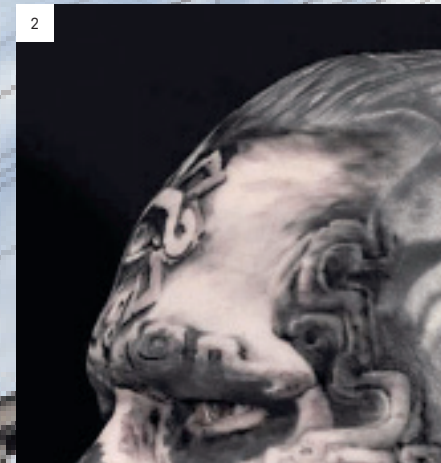
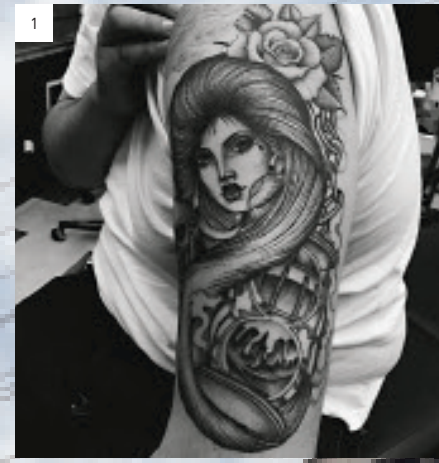
I can tell if somebody really understands lettering, the history of that style and maybe even what part of the world they're from. However, with so many tattooers these days, that's difficult sometimes, as there's been a ton of new people who have embraced the Cholo style - some good and some bad. But, the real shit is beautiful and hard as fuck at the same time. It's angular and raw. It's a reflection of years and years of the style being passed down from generation to generation. That lettering gives you the feeling of authenticity - you can't fake it until you make it.

Aside from the lettering styles, I have also long been attracted to black-and-grey tattooing.

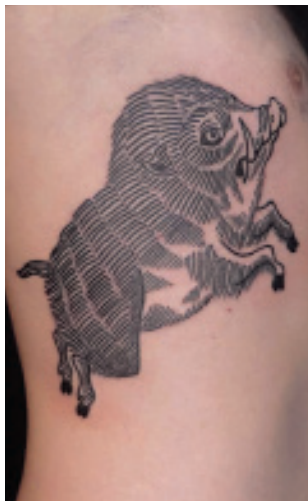
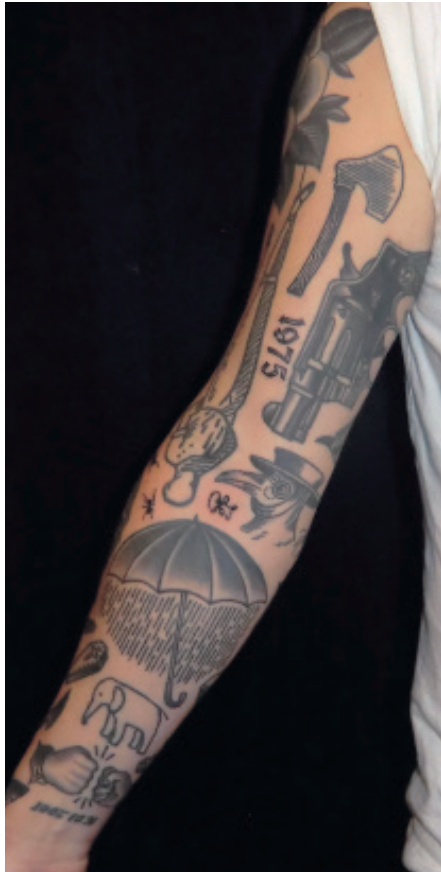
Traditional tattooing was generally military-inspired, and there is a method to the madness - every line has a purpose and the imagery has been broken down to the bare minimum. This is done for a few reasons: among them legibility and, more importantly, speed. Black-and-grey tattooing, for me, represents the exact opposite. It says 'This took time', and, as its prison origins suggest, you have nothing but time. Even these days, with the best tools available for the job, it's not uncommon for a black-and-grey portrait to take 10 to 15 hours, with multiple shades of the lightest grey to the darkest black. It's just as beautiful as a bright, colourful tattoo, and is complete with its own rich history of iconic images.

56

57



1: Chuco Moreno | 2, 4, 7: Carlos Torres | 3, 5, 17: Vetoe Tattoos | 6, 15, 19, 24: Mister Cartoon
8, 9: Freddy Corbin | 10, 14, 21: Freddy Negrete
11, 16, 23: Jose Lopez | 12, 18: El Whyner
13, 20, 22: Creeper Mendoza



B. 1965 / London, UK

Main studio: Old Habits, London, UK

'I have created a style based on the way I draw and the influences I have. I have been tattooing like this for nearly 20 years. It is now a recognizable style, much copied, and it is impossible to imagine contemporary tattooing without it.'

Duncan X, the former Sheep on Drugs vocalist, is clear about his legacy. Having started in 1998 under the tutelage of Dennis Cockell, he has broken the boundaries of traditional British tattooing with a hard-edged, direct form of image making. His aesthetic was formed while conceptualizing his own arm tattoos, many of which were produced by Cockell, and ensured a wholly unique aesthetic once he became a fully fledged artist.

'My main influence up until working at Into You was old black-and-white photos of tattooed people from the past, or criminal tattooing. Before the internet these photos were very rare and it needed a lot of imagination to fill in the gaps (literally). I developed my ideas on myself and brought these ideas to Into You.'

Duncan remained at Into You until its closure in 2016. He's since worked at Parliament and Old Habits in London, and Blut & Eisen in Berlin.



Contemporary Asian Tattooing

Maxime Plescia-Buchi

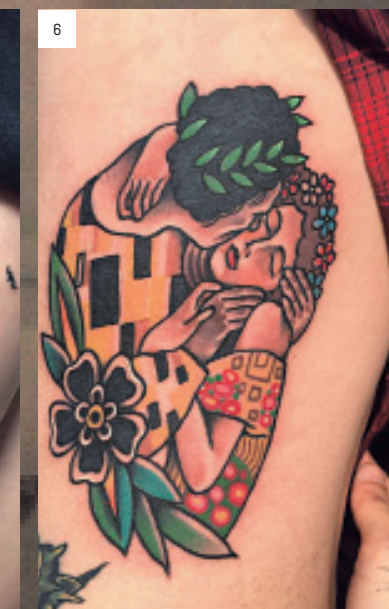
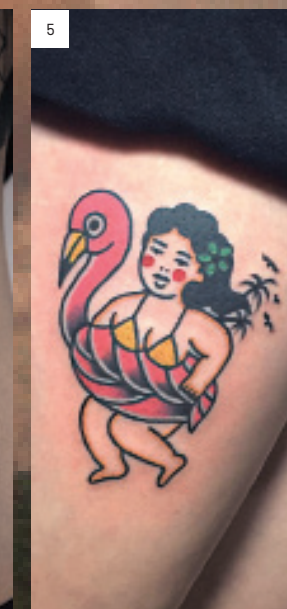
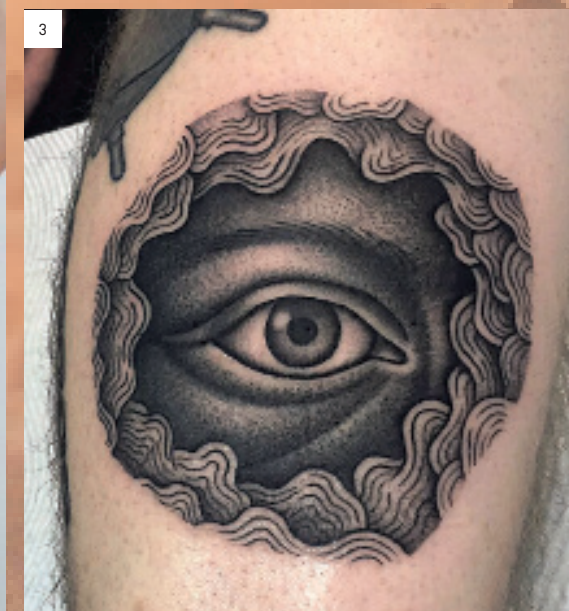
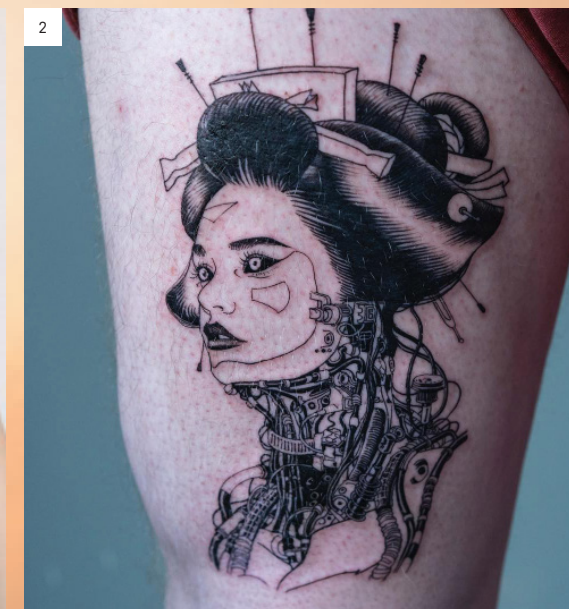
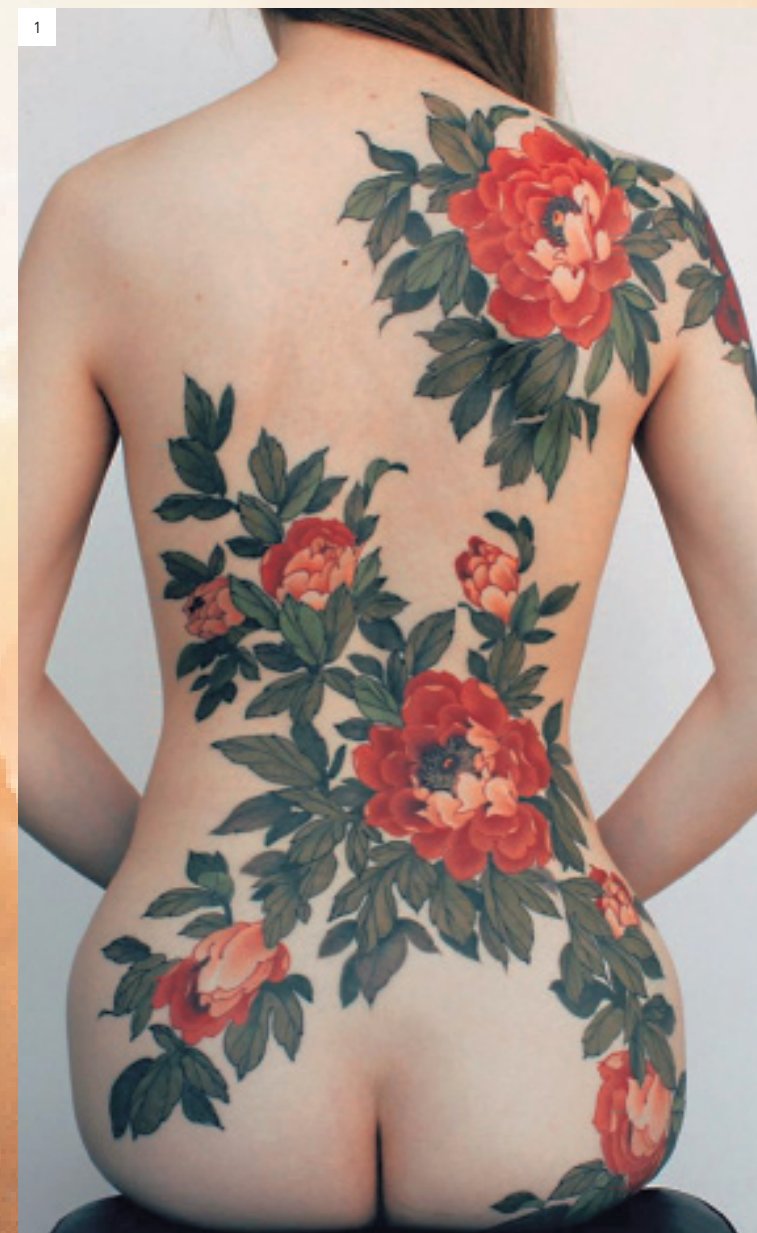
With the rapid development of Asia as a global economic, political and cultural force, it is logical to expect a development in the art of tattooing as well. And this has occurred. But unlike more globalized cultural commodities, such as pop music, tattooing nurtures itself on specific social and geographical identities. As such, it remains a polarizing practice in many countries, and in Asia the art form seems to be developing in many different directions.

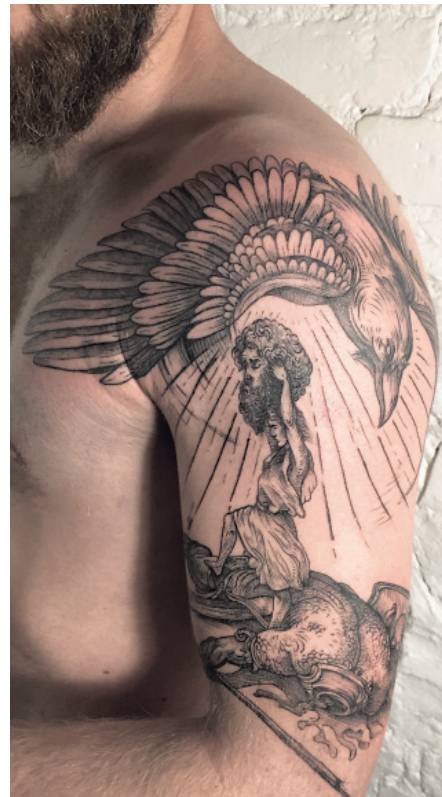
Japan remains at the centre of Asian tattooing, although Korea is slowly becoming a focal point, too. Coincidentally, these are also countries where laws governing the practice are so rigid that tattooing is practically illegal. Japan continues to represent a universal point of reference for the highest level of sophistication in the art – primarily in *irezumi* and also in more contemporary blackwork, as done by the likes of Gakkin. On the other hand, Korea – a technology-obsessed and Western-influenced country – has a

less traditional style and thus has been witness to the development of an extremely innovative and high-quality blackwork scene. Apro Lee is one artist of particular note.

Gakkin and Lee are among the leaders of the new generation of Asian artists. While the region develops its own version of Western styles, it is also interesting to note a very specific integration into those styles, motifs and aesthetics. Throughout Asia, vernacular motifs such as Korean folk-art tigers, billowing clouds and brushstrokes have become increasingly common. And, more recently, styles inspired by watercolour painting have acquired huge popularity in China, while other typically Asian styles – such as the cartoon/manga-inspired characters seen in the work of Hugo (Korea), or the micro-tattoos (often floral) done by Zihee or Silo (also Korea) – represent significant new trends.

1: Jinpil Yuu | 2, 4: Oozy Tattooer | 3: Monkey Bob | 5, 11, 15: Cumo Tattoo | 6: G. B. Kim | 7, 13: Aru Tattoo | 8: Apro Lee | 9: Wan Tattooer | 10, 14: Mico Tattoo | 12: K. Lee | 16: Ildo | 17: Woohyun Heo | 18: G. Ghost





B. 1989 / Kharkiv, Ukraine

Main studio: Sashatattooing, St Petersburg, Russia

Lesya Kovalchuk's love of literature and poetry shines through in her heavily symbolic tattooing. An illustrator by training – she previously drew video games – she never intended to work with skin and ink. 'I moved from Ukraine to Russia with the hope of continuing the path of illustrator. But I couldn't find a job,' she says. 'Then I met my friend Sasha [Masiuk]; she advised me to do a tattoo and taught me.'

Even if pure serendipity, Kovalchuk's entry into the tattoo world coincided with the opening of Masiuk's St Petersburg studio, Sashatattooing. There, she joined a crew of artists who had had similarly unconventional entries into tattooing, but who all shared a connection via their strong, black, graphic compositions. 'The studio was created before my eyes,' says Kovalchuk, who values its 'atmosphere of creativity and free-thinking'. Kovalchuk also guests at Sashatattooing in Moscow and Barcelona.

Free from the constructs of traditional tattooing, Kovalchuk sees the opportunity for new expression. 'I think traditional tattooing is a part of the past now. It has given way to a minimalistic style where symbolism takes over. The art of tattooing is in the process of a tremendous upsurge – artists are seeking to realize their own ideas on the body.'

B. 1990 / Normandy, France

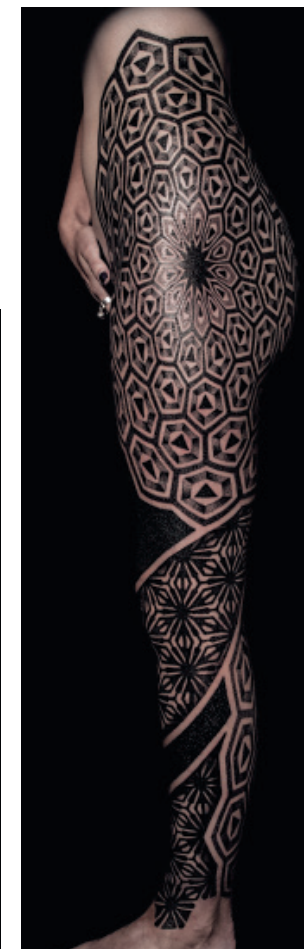
Private studio: Paris, France

All Lewisink's tattoos are created on a computer. A graduate of the ÉCAL (École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne) in Switzerland, Lewisink translates skills derived from a collective seven years of graphic-design study to produce dense dotwork assemblages that play with distortion and movement. The compositions stem from his longstanding interest in geometry, spurred by the work of the twentieth-century painter Victor Vasarely.

While studying in Switzerland, Lewisink undertook an informal tattoo apprenticeship with Matt Black, who tattooed him once a month for almost two years and helped to realize a new application for Lewisink's graphic-design skills.

'I never really wanted to be a graphic designer,' Lewisink says, 'but I knew I needed to learn the tools so I could use them in my own artworks as well as in tattooing today. I had to learn a lot from computers to be able to create more complex patterns and geometric shapes than I could do by hand. The choice of doing dotwork came naturally. I already knew I wanted to work with complex geometric shapes and patterns; I simply picked the technique that would allow me to do it on skin.'

Lewisink now tattoos from a private studio in Paris. He augments the time alone with a significant travel schedule and has worked 'next to Thomas Hooper at Rock of Ages in Austin, Scott Campbell in Los Angeles and Nazareno Tubaro in Buenos Aires', as well as 'building incredible tattoo machines with Carson Vester in Houston'.





Est. 2009 / Berlin, Germany

Founder: Jon John

AKA Berlin is, in a word, multidisciplinary. Founded by the Basque-born conceptual artist Jon John (who died in April 2017 at the age of 34 after a sustained battle with cancer) and his partner, Valentin Plessy, the shop champions a convergence of ideas that provide tattooing's avant-garde with a space to converse with other mediums.

'The initial conception of the shop was a cross between different practices, including tattoo of course. I had no aim (and still don't) to represent anything in the tattoo world,' Jon John said in an interview with *Sang Bleu* in 2015. 'I wanted to have a space where I could mix it all up, and share that with others.'

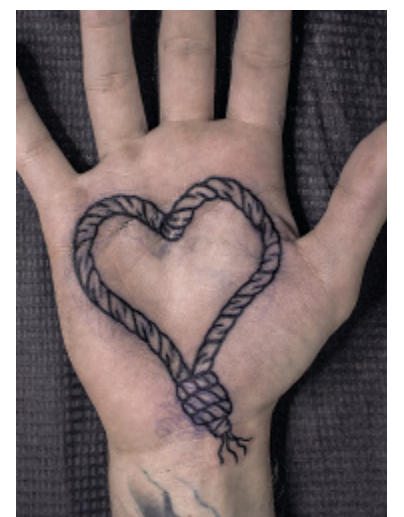
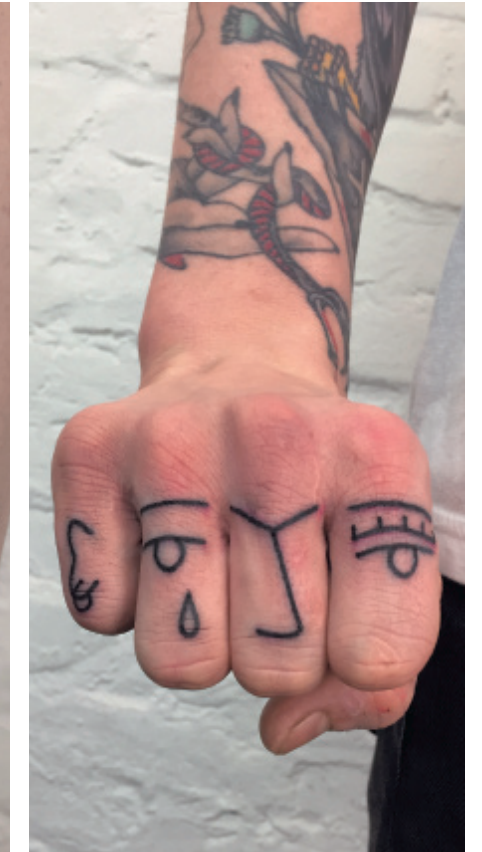
Located in Berlin's Neukölln neighbourhood, AKA opened in 2009 amid a bubble of underground creativity in the city. 'I felt that really fitted with the aesthetic of what I wanted to create,' Jon John noted. 'We were also able to secure a large space, which was important from the start as we wanted to have a really multi functional feel.' Jon John also welcomed a wide range of guests, which he believed was a 'big part of the AKA concept'.

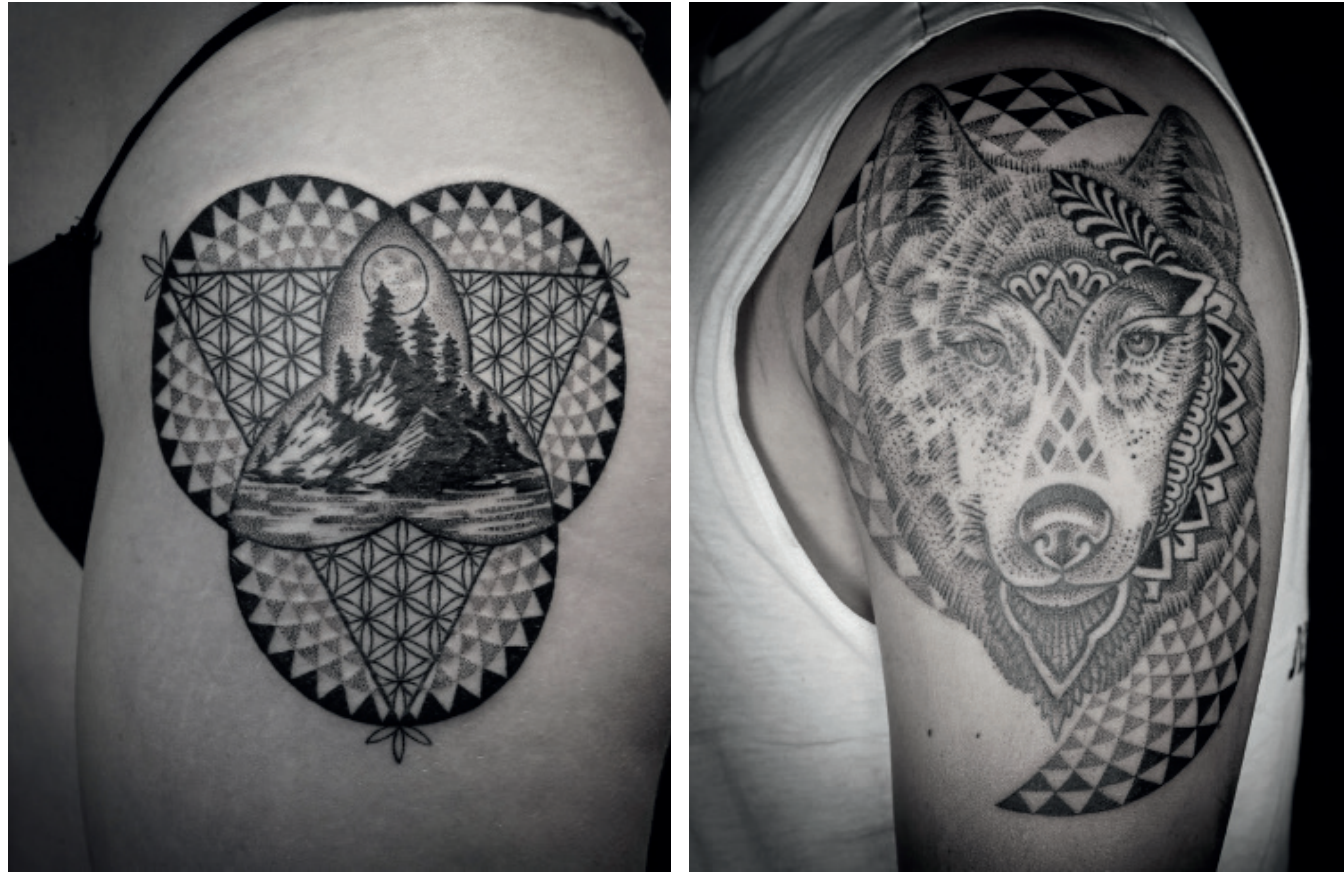
'We have a space where the artists can sleep, so they even live with us for the time they are here,' Jon John explained. 'AKA is a collective and the guests we work with make that. It creates a great international network for sharing ideas and work.' The space has since been renovated into a drawing room.

The continued rotating nature of AKA cements it as a place to feel challenged and inspired. The set-up respects 'the tradition of tattooing whilst keeping it progressive', and promotes both a distinctive learning

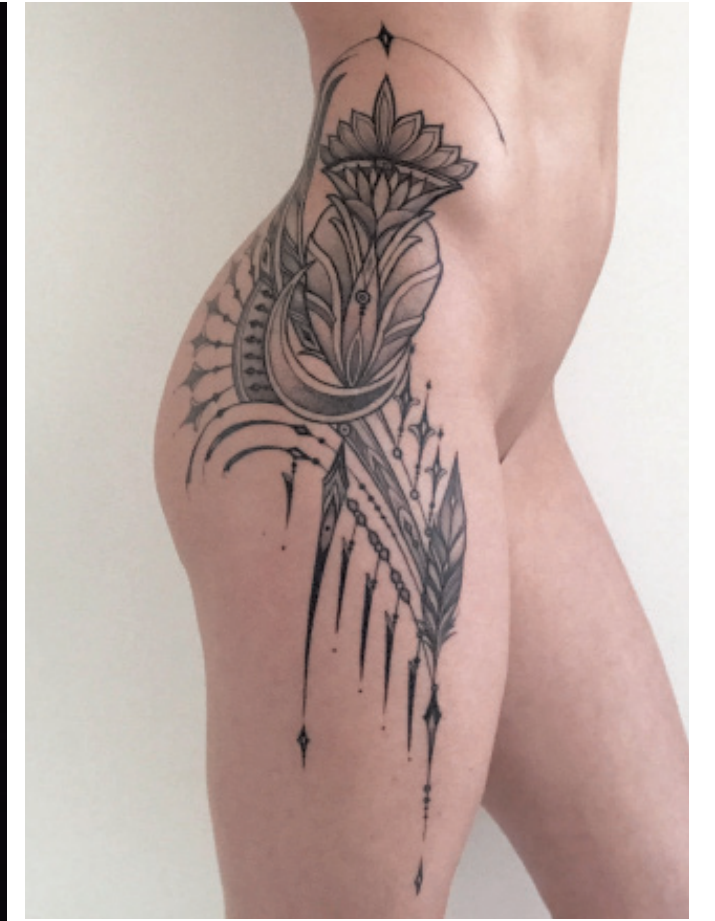
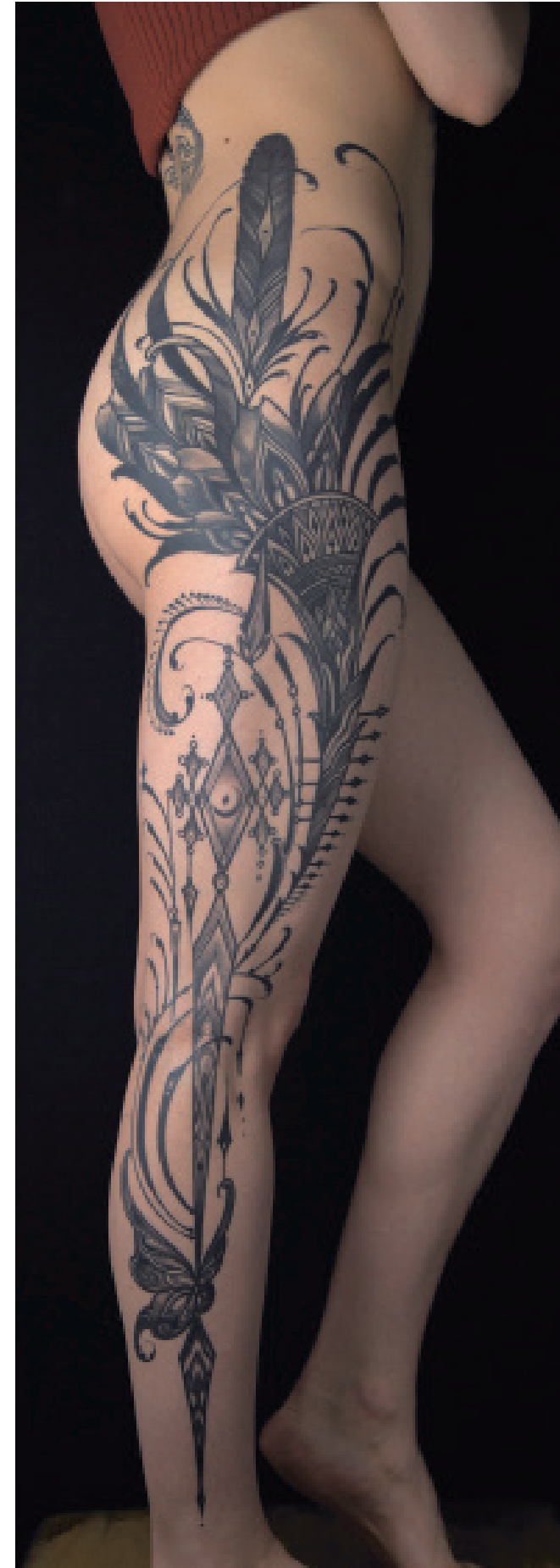
environment for up-and-coming professionals, and a launching point for their own travels. In that respect, Jon John was clear about the shop's intent: 'I'm really interested in giving a chance to the new generation, and always looking for some new, raw talent. I like to work in revealing talents - that's the most interesting process for me.'

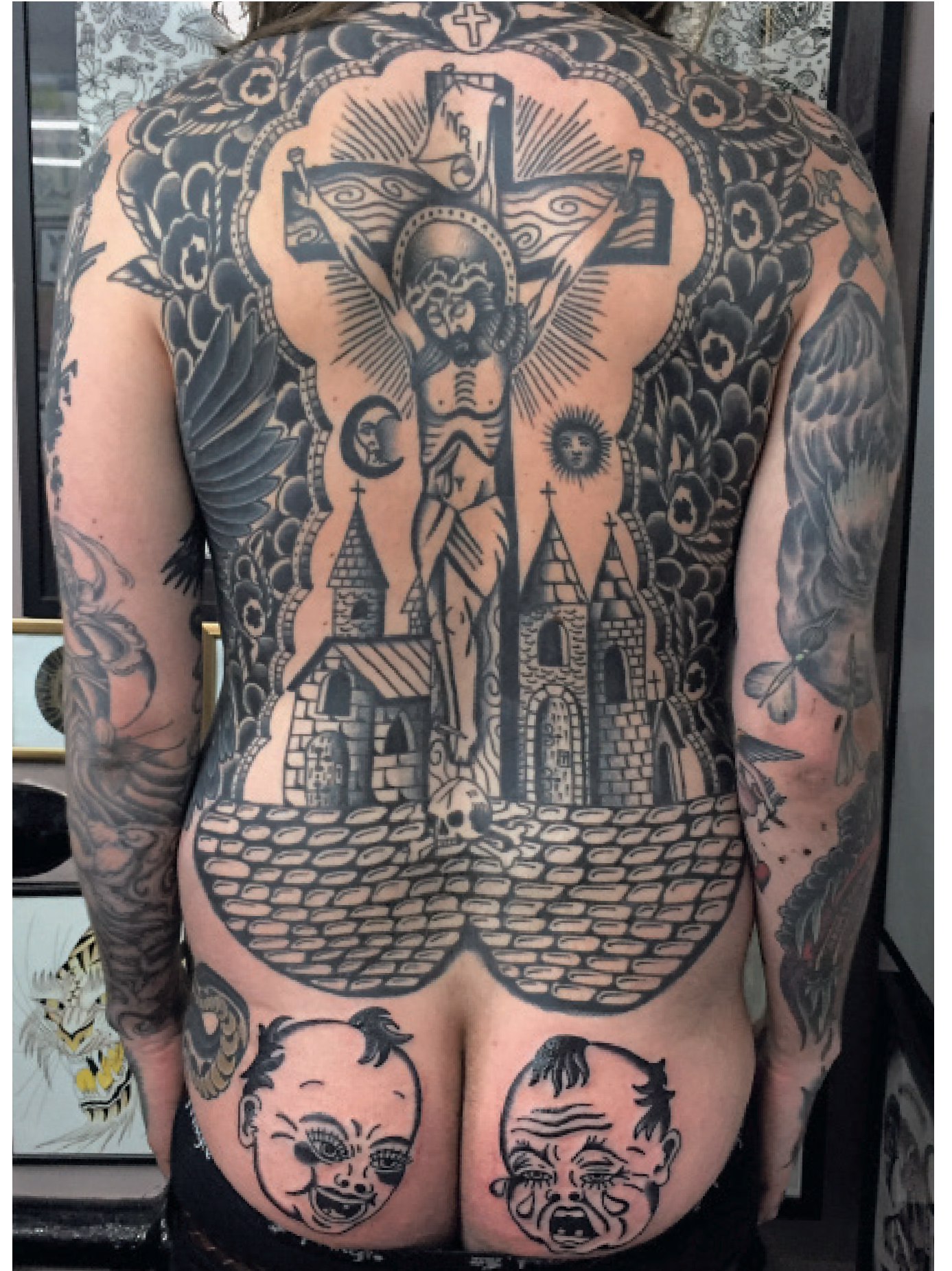
The high energy and creative breadth of AKA - situating tattooing alongside dance, design and painting - ultimately advances the intersection of body modification and other art forms. The space is now under the leadership of the talented Philippe Fernandez, and while it forms but a small internal ecosystem, its impact - thanks to regular guests (and a relative who's who in terms of contemporary former guests) - reverberates globally.





Hannah Wolf





Est. 2002 / Jackson, San Jose (CA), USA

Founder: Takahiro Kitamura

State of Grace's aim is straightforward: authentic tattoos that are true to its originating culture.

State of Grace was conceptualized as a traditional Japanese studio. Over time, the scope expanded to accommodate artists working in American traditional and Chicano styles, but the original idea remained central to the shop's identity and, after six and a half years, it relocated to the historic Japantown neighbourhood of San Jose in California. One of three remaining Japantowns in the US, the area celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2015, and State of Grace's owner, Takahiro 'Ryudaibori' Kitamura, is proud to contribute to the district's legacy.

Kitamura offers an academic view of tattooing. He's written and lectured on the subject, and curated the exhibition 'Perseverance: Japanese Tattoo Tradition in a Modern World' at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles in 2014. Through engagement with all aspects of the industry - conventions, shops and media - his perspective on contemporary tattooing is uniquely holistic.

When did you begin tattooing?

TK: I have been tattooing since 1 January 1998. I tattooed as Horitaka from 1998 to 2015. In 2015 I took the name Ryudaibori.

Where did you learn? Did you have a traditional apprenticeship?

TK: I learned with Paco Excel and Adrian Lee and then worked at a few shops before I opened State of Grace. Shortly after I began tattooing, I became an apprentice of Horiyoshi III and a member of his tattoo family for ten years.

How do you describe your style?

TK: I would describe my style as traditional Japanese tattooing. My devotion to this style was solidified before I even began to tattoo. The execution is something I hope to perfect some time before I die.

What influenced the aesthetic of State of Grace?

TK: I was influenced in part by every shop I have seen. I definitely wanted a clean and spacious outward appearance, accompanied by a lot of Japanese motifs in the design.

What do you look for in a tattoo shop?

TK: I think the two most important things are cleanliness and quality of work.

The rest is compatibility on a social level - I always tell clients to find artists they are comfortable with.

Who currently works at the studio?

TK: State of Grace is fortunate to have a crew of wonderful artists: Horitomo, Horifuji, Blake Brand, Colin Baker, Sef Samatua, Mike Suarez and Tyler Harrington. My wife Molly microblades eyebrows and does tattoo removal as well. Jakoh from LA is a regular guest artist. Horitomo is our resident master tattooer. Classically trained in Japan, he is well versed in Japanese folklore, culture, history and tattoo tradition, including *tebori* - Japanese tattooing by hand. He is the creator of Monmon Cats as well as the author of two books: *Immovable* (2011) and *Monmon Cats* (2013). Brand and Harrington are versatile young tattooers, who produce strong colour work. Suarez is an experienced veteran who excels in black and grey and Japanese styles, as does Horifuji and Jakoh. Samatua specializes in freehand Polynesian style. Colin Baker was my apprentice and has surpassed me in skill - he excels at all styles.

Have you travelled to tattoo? What does the experience mean to you?

TK: Travelling has always played an important role in my tattooing. Initially, I travelled to get my back worked on as well as to be an apprentice to a master overseas. Beyond that, travelling and working with other tattooers have helped me grow as an artist technically, but also spiritually and mentally by being in different environments.

Do you host guests? If so, what do they bring to the shop?

TK: We are very happy to have guest artists and each one advances the shop. We work only with friends. Obviously a certain skill level is a prerequisite but, more importantly, we want to enjoy working and learning together. In the past we have had guests such as Shige, Ben Grillo, Chuey Quintanar, Yokohama Horiken, Beau Brady, Horifuji, En aka Horizaru, Horikiku, Koji Ichimaru, Chris Brand, Chad Koeplinger, Si'i Liufau, Sulu'ape Steve Looney and Tuigamala Andy Taufafi.

How would you like State of Grace to be remembered?

TK: First and foremost, the legacy of the shop would be a trail of well-made tattoos and happy clients. State of Grace has always put an emphasis on

the educational aspects of tattooing: we have lectured at museums and schools, published books and articles and even curated museum exhibitions.

What are the main challenges of tattooing today?

TK: I think the challenge will always be to do a good tattoo - this is harder than it sounds. We are lucky to live in an easier time to tattoo as far as legality, access to equipment and client tattoo education level are concerned. I think the overall skill level of tattooers is very high but I am happy to see those innovators, the original ones. They are few and far between, and becoming one of those is the true challenge.

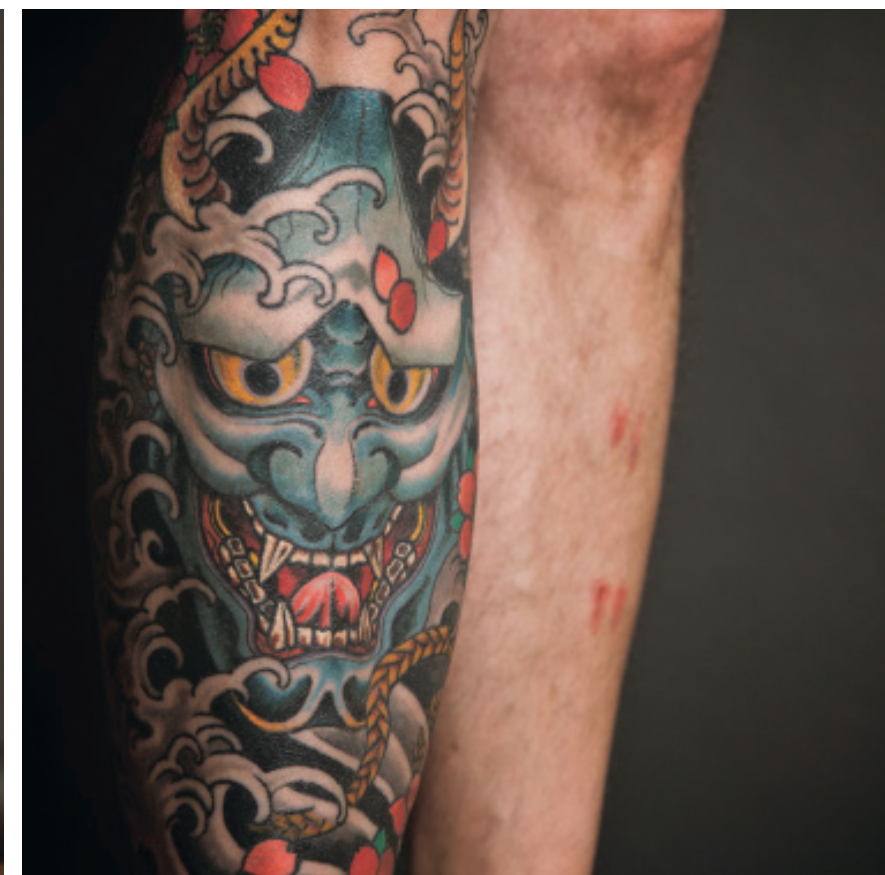
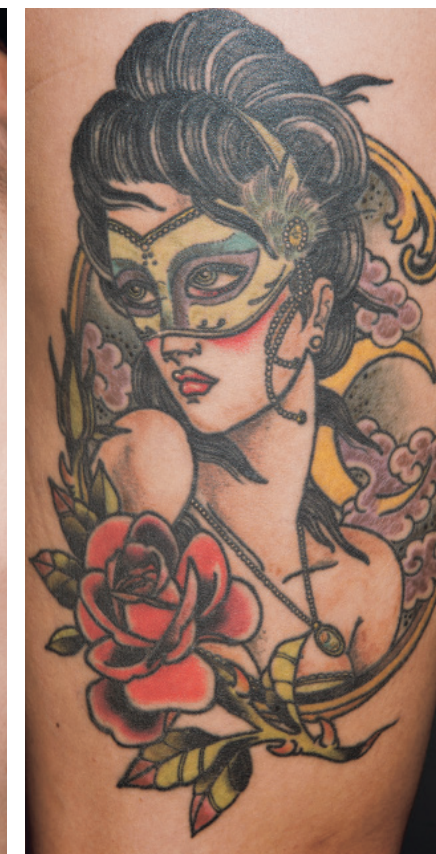
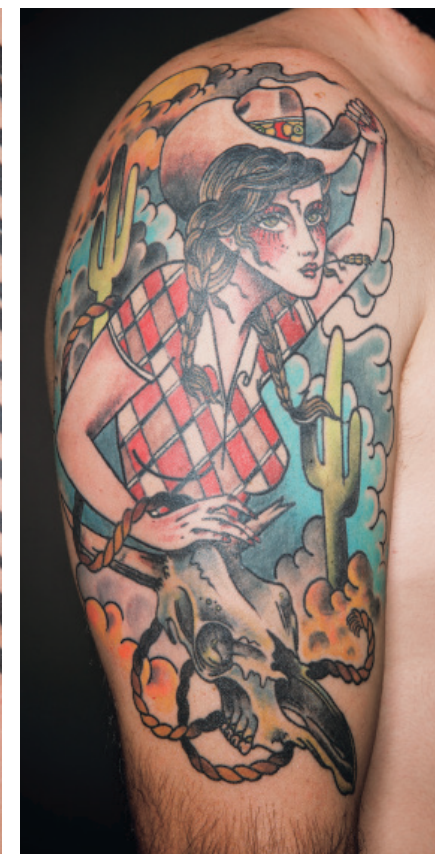
What is the role of conventions in contemporary tattooing?

TK: When I attend a convention, I am looking to meet new clients and tattooers, see old friends and hopefully sell some tattoos and merchandise. However, the main reason I do conventions is because I am interested in visiting a new city and/or country.

As the co-host and co-owner (there is a huge difference between hosting and owning a convention) of the Bay Area Convention of the Tattoo Arts since 2004, I have very specific ideas about how conventions should be. My partner, Roman Enriquez, and I saw a need to do something a bit different. We wanted to throw a show centred on tattooing, where tattoos and the tattooers doing them were the main attraction. That is why we do not allow piercing, bands, pin-up contests, tattoo contests or celebrity appearances. We keep the merchandise vendors to a minimum in order to ensure that tattooers can make plenty of money on their own merchandise. We have kept our show small (96 booths) in order to keep the quality level up, and have been very lucky to have an amazing roster of talented artists every year. We have also hosted numerous tattooer book releases and have had seminars by Grime, Shige, Horitomo, Jeff Gogue, Tim Hendricks and Don Ed Hardy, to name a few. We are proud to be a tattooer-centred show and will continue to do it this way.

What does the future hold for tattooing?

TK: On one hand, I am part of a movement to put tattooing in as many museums and galleries as possible, but part of me still reminisces about the days when tattooing was more underground and less socially acceptable. I do not think



any of us own tattoos, it is larger than us and we will do whatever it takes to do.