

AUSTRALIAN **ink**

TATTOOS. STYLE. CULTURE.

Ruby Rose

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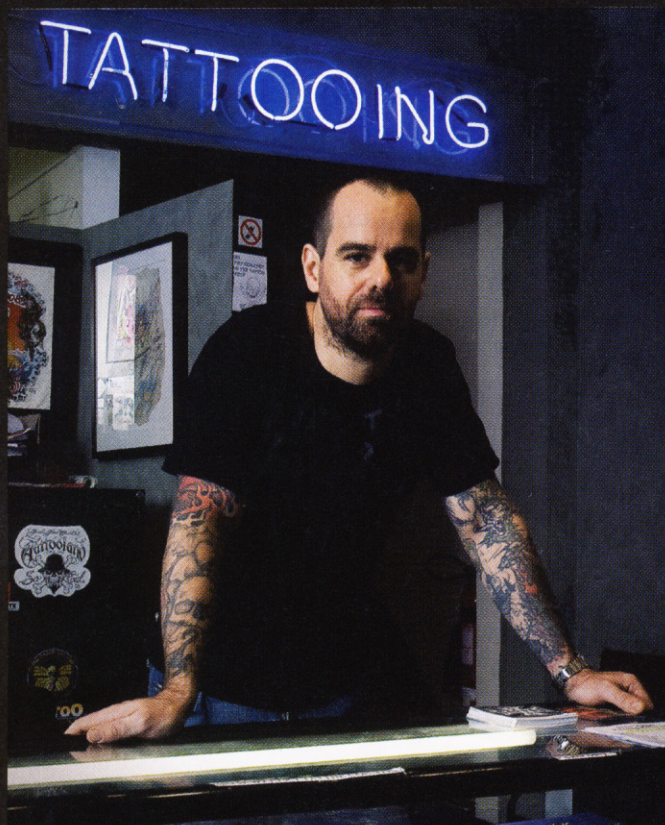
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AUTHENT/INK

Australian Ink's
resident tattoo
advisor Kian Forreal
on a pirate's life

AFTER SPENDING OVER 85 HOURS IN A PLANE recently while circumnavigating the globe to the farthest points you can imagine before coming back on a different route, stopping at eight major international cities along the way, there is one thing that I can tell you without any doubt whatsoever: that tattooing is alive all over the world in a way it never has been before.

Of course, this is a fantastic boon for the myriad of great artists out there who no longer have to struggle to find people to wear their art or try to convince people to open their minds and start with large coverage and bold colours. Tattoo culture is plastered all over the set now. It's everywhere you look. Airports feature large advertising displays using tattooed models, and brand name banks tout tattoos as a symbol of diversity. Even product packaging itself playing a role, with tattoos as the 'skin' of the box, bottle or package. Even I'm guilty of contributing to this new craze, with one of my dragons featuring on the outside of a new Australian energy drink. But that's not what this article is about.

What concerns me is the amount of biting going on in the tattoo world; the copying, the watering down, and the mediocrity that seems to be permeating this thing I love. Like all things, the lowest common denominator sets the standard and tattooing is no different. Listen, we're all fucking pirates, right? Tattooers, I mean. Everyone looks at everyone else's work. But there is an important difference between being inspired by, revering and referencing other great tattoos and the artists who make them, and outright copying. What seems to be taking place is the bad tattooers are 'referencing' and copying line for line and design for design the real tattooers work, right from their photos in magazines and on MySpace. And what's more, they're doing it badly and selling it as their own. This is bullshit. It is not only plagiarism of someone else's hard work – it also hurts tattooing by diluting it with crappy art.

Some styles that are only a few years old, such as dot work and geometric body designs, suddenly have hundreds of artists doing them – and mostly doing them badly. The good ones, on the other hand, went to get tattooed by the innovators, saw the designs being made in person, got to know the artists and learned from them directly. There is a huge difference between that and just copying shit out of a magazine.





And you know whose fault that is? Yours. Don't bring your potential tattoo artist a photo of someone else's tattoo by some other artist, and tell him "I want this or something close to it." Because you know what? That's exactly what you'll get. A shitty version of someone else's tattoo. And the story goes on.

Your best strategy to getting a great tattoo and contributing to the great art of tattooing is this, and I mean this seriously: it's all about contributing. If you're not helping you're hurting, and no one likes a parasite. The first thing any potential tattooee should do is learn to tell the difference between a good tattoo and a not-so-good tattoo. By doing that you'll be able to tell the difference between an 'okay' tattoo artist and a great tattoo artist. Spend a minute educating yourself. Check out the most well-known, bad-ass, legendary tattooers' works and see the real deal. Even if you can't afford to get tattooed by them, travel to where they are and, at the minimum, see what a legit tattoo looks like. Then find an artist whose work you like and reference his or her own work. Or bring them source material that isn't someone else's tattoo. Help create something fresh instead of just Xeroxing someone else's stuff. Because we all know what a photocopy of a photocopy ends up looking like: Crap. Look at art books, old and new. Look at prints and pictures. For example, if you want a lion portrait on your arm, bring your artist a high resolution picture of a lion – not a picture of someone else's lion portrait tattoo. You'll get much better results and end up with something completely yours!

Which brings me to my next topic: lettering tattoos. From my travels it seems a lot of artists these days view lettering tattoos as the new 'tribal'. An abundance of fast and easy tattoos that supposedly don't require any

talent or homework to pull off. In short, they see them as tattoos to be banged out as quickly as possible with little or no thought or care as to the what, where and how.

I love good script and lettering tattoos and 'writing' is really a style unto itself. So naturally it pisses me off to no end to see tattooers just fake it and scribble some shit up or, worse yet, print it out from the computer, stick it in a random spot and tattoo it there forever. It pains me to see this. So do me a favour: don't use those tattooers. If you're keen on some nice writing, find a guy or girl that likes doing lettering. Someone that has put in the work and will give you something to be proud of. There are many different styles of script writing you can get with varying degrees of filigree (fancy stuff) around it and as many different ways to shade and shadow it. A well-done script tattoo is truly a piece of art. I still study lettering whenever I can and suck up as much information from visiting artists who are better than me or do it in a different way. Like with all the arts, you never stop learning.

So in closing, get some fresh inspiration for both you and your tattoo artist. Don't bite other peoples work. And remember to seek out the right artist for the right job – someone who is the genuine article. We can help stop the parasites if you stop giving them money. Keep it real.

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 16 years international experience and specialising in traditional Japanese tattoo work. He has worked all over the world and has studied under some of the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo, Surry Hills. For more, visit www.kianforreal.com or, for information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal, please visit www.fadeyourtattoo.com.