





THAT INKING FEELING

Being tattooed is a personal choice, an awesome one that will leave you physically stronger, more desirable to the opposite sex, and more likely to die in a machine gun duel. It will however mean that you will never be buried in a Jewish graveyard (unless you have some really good mates with loose morals and access to shovels).

First lets clear up a few arguments - Tattoo's are not forever, the human body is nothing if not biodegradable. They are however for the rest of your life which, if the Internet doomsayer and digital slack jawed yokels are to be believed, will probably end later this year when a cougar-headed Mayan god will eat us whole. Secondly the oft cited 'tattoos on old people look horrible' argument. Well that's a matter of opinion and I have to say I have never looked at an eighty year old woman and thought 'I could really fancy her if it wasn't for that tattoo'. Old person's skin is wrinkly, spotty, and weird anyway, a picture of Scooby-do arm wrestling Macho Man Randy Savage on a table of fire skulls is only going to cheer things up a bit, no matter how smudged.

Tattooing at its best is the opportunity to commission a piece of unique work of art you will be proud of for years to come. At its worst it's some guy who had his school book doodles took seriously scratching lazy flash into stupid peoples skin with a machine bought from the back of a magazine.

With a good tattooist you are paying for not only the skill of pushing ink into your skin, as well as the hygiene and safety side that all tattooists take seriously, there is a long earned skill in producing thin fine lines and blending colours on the most difficult and varied medium you could think of. But also you are paying for their creative flair, all artists spend their entire lives trying to find their style and voice, a good tattooist has found theirs and is willing to collaborate with you to produce something that pleases both of you, is placed exactly right on your specific body, and has both resonance with you and your gods.

The tattooing world can seem a bit closed from the outside, mostly because once you get a tattoo done there is a small sense of kinship that you feel with someone who has made the same commitment of pain and time; it's just a nod, a smile, a tip of the imaginary hat, but it's there. The tattoo shop itself though shouldn't be a scary place though. I spoke to Kurt Marlow of Falling Leaves Studio, a lithe hipsterish man with a warm Black Country accent which belies a sharp and zen-like mind. I mostly spoke to him while he drew a magpie on my chest permanently with a needle. As long as you remember that as well as artist and artisan inklingers are business persons, turning up late, far too early or not turning up to appointments are not just annoying but cost them money. Here are Kurt's rules to perfect tattoo harmony.



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Images: Kurt Marlow

1. Research your tattoo spend a good amount of time looking at various designs and decide which style of tattoo you would like.

2. Be unique try not to follow any 'fads'. As a tattooist, I am constantly been asked to do tattoos similar to David Beckham's. Fads have a shelf life whilst unique tattoos are timeless.

3. Remember a tattoo is for life, and life throws many curve balls your way, so make sure you are dedicated to the idea of being tattooed. There are too many young kids wearing tattoos on their hands, neck and face. Although some people may find this desirable at the time, in the long run a huge amount of regret may be something that you have to deal with.

4. Find your artist – your artist's work must reflect the style of tattoo that you require. A good artist may have a long waiting list, be patient.

5. Is the studio licensed, clean, friendly? Make it a pleasurable experience.

6. Don't hesitate to travel to your artist, whether they are one mile or 100 miles away.

7. Study your artist's work thoroughly. Compare his/her work to other artists. Is the line-work consistent? Colours bold? Shading smooth?

8. A GOOD TATTOO IS NOT CHEAP,

A CHEAP TATTOO IS NOT GOOD. Cost should not become an issue; budget for your tattoo. Just because an artist has a high cost, don't let this deceive you. As mentioned earlier, thoroughly check their work. Does their cost reflect their art?

9. Contacting the artist: Please be patient with your artist, tattooist are very busy so you may have to wait for a correspondence. Try to give them as much reference as possible, whether it be your own drawings, print out and photos. The more the better, it will give your artist a good vision of what is expected.

10. Turn up to your appointment on time, most studios refuse to tattoo people that are late. So be prompt, even if you are early. Don't take friends; a tattoo is a personal experience between you and the artist. You don't want giggling friends that will get bored sitting around.

11. Trust your artist they have a vast experience in tattooing. Trust their decisions as they will be for the better. But, speak up if you're not 100% happy with any ideas that they put forward.

12. Be polite. Tattooist are not big scary monsters (well not most of them), you want to have a good rapport with your artist.

13. Enjoy the day. Tattoos do sting, but they are not unbearable. Just remember, you will be left with something that is special.