

Ink for the Ages

PERMANENT IS THE ULTIMATE FASHION STATEMENT *by Dante Zuñiga-West*

Remember the last time you got cut? What was the occasion? Bad breakup? Triumph over adversity? Death of a loved one? Was it more than a fashion statement? I asked the experts. “It’s like wearing an article of clothing for your entire life,” says tattoo artist TC Combs of Eugene’s Ink’d Up Tat2.

In a cultural habitat where today’s *in* will be *out* tomorrow and kids are running around dressed like it’s 1985 three decades later, is the notion of timeless expression a faux pas?

Perhaps not. “I definitely see trends, and people are still getting tattooed,” Erich Daoust of High Priestess says. Flipping through Daoust’s accomplished portfolio, I stop at a sobering image: The illustration of an upended M16, its bayonet sunk in the ground — a helmet hangs on the stock, with a name and rank cut beneath the weapon. “Do you get a lot of these?” I ask.

Daoust says that his career as a tattoo artist began around the same time the war in Iraq (the second round) started. He has tattooed many a vet, and he notes that soldiers have been getting inked in such a fashion since the latter part of WWI. Young men and women in our modern era, returning from “the devil’s sandbox,” continue to adorn themselves with the ageless art.

“Tattoos are milemarks in peoples’ lives, and if you have commitment issues tattoos aren’t for you,” Combs says as he points to my tattoos and then motions to his own. “Everyone has a story,” he says. “Tattoos tell it up front. Clothing isn’t really the same.”

Though not the same, clothing is undoubtedly an expression of the self. And all stories/scars aside, you don’t want to get something put on your body forever that isn’t aesthetically pleasing. But the intransigence of a tattoo seems to be the defining line between what some would call fashion and others call rolling out of bed to meet the day.

This said, popular trends inside tattoo culture come and go just like those that drive the fashion world. “Photo realism is very popular right now,” Daoust says. “Four or five years from now, that won’t be the case.”

Currently, giant rib tattoos are all the rage. A few years back it was the lower-back piece, crudely referred to by some as the “tramp stamp.” Before that there was the tribal armband.

It is unclear what the next fad in the tattoo universe will be. Maybe neck tats will make a comeback? Red flames around the forearm? One thing is certain: Whatever fashionable image works its way to the surface will have the same thing in common with every other tattoo — permanence. ♦



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