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whether or not you think you're ready for this, here it is," Barasch said.

Empowerment and self-expression

Barasch was born and raised in Portland. Her parents are both painters and encouraged Barasch to make art. In particular, her own drawings growing up were influenced by her father's "heavy metal" and "creepy" comics collection.

As a teen, Barasch sought out her first tattoo from a friend of a friend. Looking back, the experience was "a bit sketchy," but nevertheless an empowering way to commemorate her budding passion for artistic self-expression.

"I started getting tattooed very young," she said. "I immediately felt this sense of empowerment and self-expression that goes along with tattooers and the conversations that happen after you get tattooed."

Another formative experience for Barasch was traveling to Israel for a study abroad program at an integrated Arab and Jewish school called "Hand-in-Hand." The program was accessible to Barasch through the Metropolitan Learning Center where she graduated valedictorian.

Her continued interest in Israeli politics led her to study at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem after high school. She continued to draw and dream about tattoo art.

After one year, Barasch left Jerusalem to pursue her Oregon tattooing license back in Portland. Post tattoo school she began working in a group studio run by the school. The environment was supportive, yet she wasn't challenged enough to truly grow in her practice.

"The schooling process is mostly about sanitation and gets you through some technical stuff but as far as composition, drafting process and technique, you're just not exposed to it in school. You only get that by being around other tattoo artists," Barasch said. "In the studio I had a great support system but I was just sort of wondering, where do I go from here?"

In a self-described "drastic move," Barasch returned to Jerusalem in 2016 to work at Sam Tattoo Art. Due to bureaucracy around her work visa, she returned to Portland in 2017 and worked at shops around the city.

Humanizing the tattoo experience

Challenged by the uncertainty of this time, Barasch began to grow her vision as an artist and define her niche. Female clientele were drawn to her for custom work and a compassionate experience, no matter what part of the world she was in.

Claire Walber, a client of Barasch's, said, "what I love about Renee as both a tattoo artist and a person is that she doesn't just do only what she would like, but rather tailored [my tattoo] to my personality, style and emotions."

Barasch has found that females particularly may feel too intimidated to approach an artist for a tattoo which motivated her even more to advocate for women "within an industry that isn't always particularly kind to women."

"There's this sense that you need to prove yourself constantly and front with this aggression and masculinity. I think society sees tattoos like that. There is a level of toughness to get through the tattoo, but it doesn't define who you are," Barasch said.

A collaboration between client and artist

Barasch's commitment to running a welcoming studio is why she opens her shop for every single art walk. While she features discounted designs, her priority is connecting with clients and letting them feel at home within the space.

"Everyone is welcome and I really emphasize consultations," Barasch said. "It's okay to come in and just say hi and if we don't vibe then I'm so glad that person took the initiative to connect with their artist."

Barasch noted that she doesn't take it lightly that people are trusting her

physically with their skin but also emotionally with the stories that surround their tattoo experience.

"While personal, there's also a community piece of caring for each other and setting



Eric Thornburg

Simply Human Art tattoo studio in the basement of The Maker's Space in Astoria.

up an environment that is safe and nurturing and allows for conversations about tattoos to happen," Barasch said. "It makes me happy



Renee Barasch

An example of one of Barasch's original black and white illustrations.

that I can try to bring an element that I feel is lacking in an industry that has given me so much."



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