



AUTHENT/INK

Inked Australia's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal on why the tattoo industry shouldn't be regulated by the government.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE but I didn't get into tattooing because I wanted to walk the straight and narrow, lead a normal life, follow the rules and run to teacher every time I needed help. I got into this craft because I had to do something different, live my own life so to speak... I was called to it somehow. I did my first tattoo nearly 25 years ago and I never really looked back.

I will whole heartedly admit that everything is different now from the 'old days', tattooing is mainstream, mid-brow so speak and even has a certain air of respectability in places where you couldn't even mention the word tattoo in the past. Its on TV, its in the ads we see in the magazines, the musicians we listen to are covered in them, it really has come into its own.

And for certain it has always had its dark, dirty underbelly.

There has been a lot of noise about eBay kits and kids tattooing from home and scratchers working in the backyard etc etc. This has always gone on, since you could mail order equipment. The problem is much wider now as the tools are easily purchased, but the scenario remains the same: guy buys some tattoo gear, does a few dodgy tattoos on his mates, makes a fool of himself and his mates and usually within a few weeks the machines and ink end up either in the closet, the bin or back on eBay. The press has gotten a hold of this and is making much ado about nothing. Tales of hep C being spread around, fear mongering the dangers of tattooing in general, children tattooing each other! How the hell are kids ordering tattoo gear and the parents not noticing what is going? Individual responsibility should play some part here, parents should know what their offspring are getting up to. Now I expect this kind of nonsense from the mainstream press, what I didn't expect was loud voices in the tattoo community asking their councils to regulate tattooing and license tattooers! WTF? Are you serious? Do you really think a law is going to stop anyone from tattooing at home? Hasn't stopped drugs, violence or guns. Almost all tattoo shops work within the boundaries of the health department for cleanliness and sterility, use new needles and ink, and good equipment. We pay our taxes and work hard and regulate ourselves. Or at least we should be regulating ourselves. There



are always going to be a few of these kitchen magicians that linger and do some shitty tattoos out of their house or garage, and for some reason people will get tattooed by them, either because its cheap or 'underground' or a friend of a friend... whatever. You can't enforce a law to stop that. Won't happen.

The problem is with the client choosing to get tattooed there... and frankly, if you as a tattoo artist are losing business to a guy tattooing in kitchen with eBay equipment, you're doing something very very wrong. Asking the local government to regulate tattooing and save you from the 'scratchers' is akin to asking your mommy to protect you from bullies taking your lunch money. You gotta stand up for yourself. She can't be there all the time and neither can the council. The only thing that is going to get regulated is you, the lawful working artist. Fees, Licences, Inspections, paperwork, more fees, that's what you're setting yourself and us as a whole up for when you involve the government. Some folks are even asking for the selling of equipment to be regulated! Give your head a shake will you. You want to fill out paperwork every time you order some needles or ink? Not only will you be doing admin paperwork half your free time, the price of tattooing will have to go up to cover the costs. If you have a problem with a local backyarder, go see him/her and educate them on the dangers of what their doing. Don't cry to authority. Or better yet, educate your clients and their friends and the scratcher won't have any business. They'll go away.

I lived in Europe for quite a while where in some cities the local council took it upon themselves to regulate tattooing quite extensively. The results were not pretty. For instance, in Holland all inks must be kept in a refrigerator so they don't 'go bad'. Seriously. So not only are all your inks thick and cold but you have to walk to a fridge everytime you want to pour some out. Eighty euro fine for every bottle found unrefrigerated if you get an inspection. For the record, ink doesn't ever go bad as long the lid stays firmly fastened and nothing get inside to contaminate it. In Spain all tattoo areas must be self-enclosed booths with closed doors, for every artist, so a room full of cubicles, charming.

Most health inspectors don't know the difference between an ultrasonic and

an autoclave, and why should they? They haven't been educated in these matters. They're just civil servants trying to pay their bills and get thru life like the rest of us. Do you really want people who know absolutely nothing about tattooing writing the rules? And yes I know they are artists out there that are willing to 'help' write the proper rules... but it's not necessary, it'll do more harm than good in the long run. We know the rules, and the kitchen wizards won't follow them anyways... so whats the point? You cannot outlaw stupidity. The thing to do here is educate on the folly of getting tattooed by amateurs, get the word out, and as an artist if you make it clear you don't fix mistakes by home artists, people will eventually understand its not worth the risk. ☹

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 18 years international experience who specialises in traditional Japanese tattoo work and script lettering. 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 in Surry Hills. His website is: www.kianforreal.com For information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal please visit www.fadeyourtattoo.com

