



SO WHILE TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE SOME FACETS OF LIFE EASIER and more convenient, it has also wrought woe on the quality and authenticity of many forms of art and culture. Up until recently these could only be practiced by dedicated individuals who spent their time studying and had the patience to learn a craft inside and out, mastering the various skills necessary to practice said craft.

Apart from tattooing, another of my passions is photography. I love taking pictures and trying to understand what makes a photo 'great' in terms of composition, depth and lighting. I am an amateur photographer to be sure, but I have a decent idea of what I am doing with a digital camera. Technology has made that possible. The ability to see instant results with different exposures and light sources, backgrounds, focal lengths, film speeds, all the things that photographers of old used to have to wait days to see while getting their film developed, we now see in seconds, and we can adjust our settings accordingly, for better or worse. While it has made photography easier to learn and understand, and created a generation of picture takers (not to mention big business in digital cameras that are obsolete by the time they hit the shelves), it has also done away with the actual 'understanding' of what it means to take a picture: capturing light. There are fewer actual photographers now than ever in proportion to those taking photos. The more I learn about photography the more I am drawn to the process of using film, trying different film formats, camera types and styles, maybe even developing my own exposures at some point down the line. It becomes not just 'point and shoot' but a complete understanding of the light capturing process from beginning to end.

Tattooing isn't far different. The thing that kept most wannabes out of the mix was supplies and equipment. You had to learn how to make needles before you could tattoo and then making them for each tattoo was a must because no one else was going to do it for you. And if you go back far enough... a bit before my time, you also had to mix your own ink, for the same reasons. This ensured, by default, that only the people that really wanted to were doing the tattooing and that was after they had taken the time to find someone to teach them to make the needles and ink. It was real long path to get yourself into a shop holding a machine and tattooing a client. Now things are easier and more convenient and you can buy it all with the touch of button – and away you go. And just like photography we have plenty more picture makers but fewer actual tattooers

AUTHENT/INK

Inked Australia's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal on why the tattoo profession is mimicking the dumbing down of professional photography.



KIAN'S PHOTO BY TRISTAN STEFAN EDOUARD



style that is popular. I think a lot of people are missing the point of tattoos, and more importantly, overlooking the potential that tattooing has to shape people and culture. It is a powerful form of social expression that is having the soul sucked out of it, just like picture taking. Imagine having your entire life captured as an iPhone or Instagram photo set... it would suck. How are your successors going to share your life with their children when all they have to remember you are grainy low res pics from your nights out or Facebook updates?

Just for the record, in case any one is wondering what I think of tattoo reality shows since the latest American offering, *Ink Master*. I want to make it clear that, in my opinion, they are all horrible facsimiles of what real tattooing is about. I don't watch them, they suck and I reckon they do far more harm than good. On top of that, the TV news and newspapers have taken an interest in tattooing again of late – it's too popular they say. Blah, blah, blah... every time I talk to these people I regret it, they always take things out of context and use your words to prove whatever their point is. The mainstream media cannot be trusted to give tattooing a fair shake. If you're a tattoo artist, be careful what you say to them.

In closing, the recent hoopla about banning police officers from showing visible tattoos and tattooed cadets from even getting into the force is a farce. My understanding is that the police force is meant to represent each segment of society to a certain degree: male, female, straight, gay, Causcasian, Asian, etc... a very large percentage of Australians are tattooed. It only seems right that the men and women that are out there keeping the peace are allowed the same rights and freedoms to express themselves as ordinary citizens are. After all, I'd rather see a cop with a sleeve walking the street than one without a tattoo. The tattooed officer has a more human element to him that would make it easier to relate to, and perhaps make his dealing with the public more effective.

Just my 2 cents. ☺

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that understand the process and the technical aspects of what it means to put pigment under the skin and how to make it stay there the way we want.

Understanding ink mixing is akin to understanding different film types and how they react under certain conditions and lighting. Understanding tattoo needles is equal to knowing how a camera and lens let light expose on to the film. Both things you don't really need to know these days to get a very ordinary result. Without sounding too hippy dippy, tattoos in the old days used to be kinda magical, the smells, the mystery, the noise and tools and the unknown. The tattooist, a sort of magician that toiled in a dark room with bottles of various inks and potions, it really was something. And photographers were the same with their big boxes, meters, charts and timers, chemicals and dark little magic rooms.

If you've ever had a chance to look at old large format photographs they are haunting with the amount of detail that has been captured in them. And they are amazing because of the technical prowess of the photographer capturing just the right amount of light in the right way to freeze the moment. He wasn't messing around, or half-assing it. It was serious business. And the same goes for old tattoo masters from the last century and beyond: Japanese tattoo masters, Pacific Islander tattooers or any dedicated tattoo artist that took it as a matter of their honour to do the best they could. Their work speaks for itself. It was real and you can see it in every line, every detail. There was no fucking around. Tattoos were built for a lifetime.

The same thing that is happening in photography – low quality, flat, bland, quick, boring, digital – has happened in tattooing. Supplies are low quality and mass produced, designs copied from copies of copies of tattoos already done and posted online, they are created as quick as possible with little attention to detail or longevity and are, for the most part, put on the skin for little or no reason other than a fleeting fashion statement or for the artist to be working in the latest

