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# Inked

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# The business of tattooing

Homegrown talent: Claire Reid, Justin Acca, Sam Rulz and Mick Squires, along with Kian Forreal, Ran Maclurkin, Dr Rev and Teneile Napoli + Rites of Passage and Surf n' Ink!

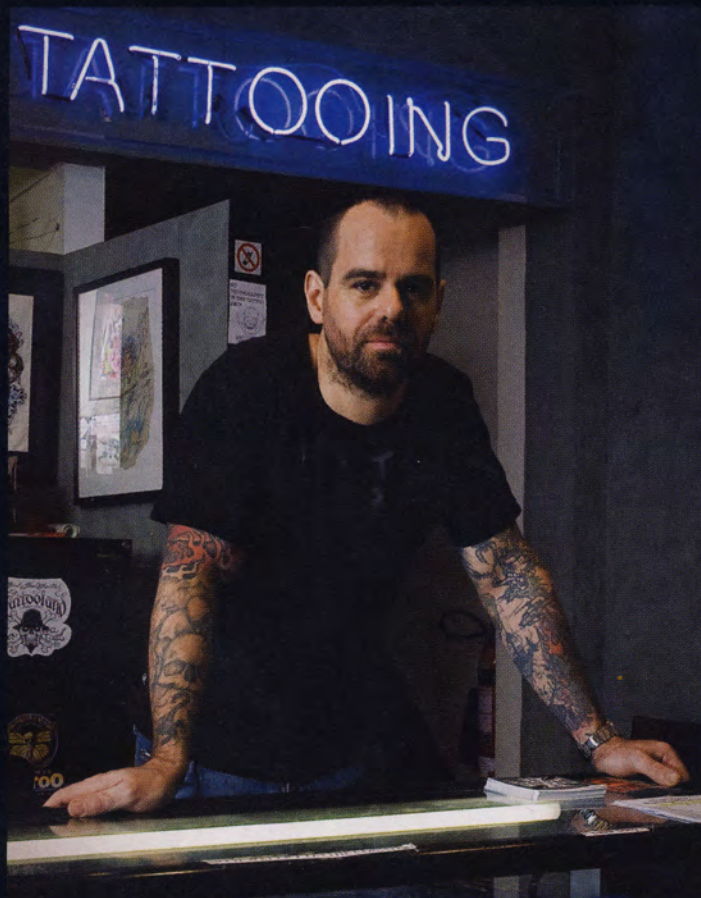
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## AUTHENT/INK

Inked Australia's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal on getting tattooed in Thailand.

**IF YOU WERE TO GOOGLE 'THAI TATTOO', THE MAJORITY OF RESULTS** would show people on forums asking the question: "Should I get tattooed in Thailand?" Let's talk about that a bit more.

Obviously, I have a vested interest in people getting good tattoos here in Australia and supporting the nation's talent – it is, after all, where I work and ply my trade. So as much as I'd like to say this is an objective article, there's bound to be some bias on my part based on the above.

Also, there are some very decent Thai tattoo artists here in Australia as well as in Thailand, so I have nothing against Thai tattoo artists in general. My problem is with the clients looking to save a buck and feeding the bottom rung of the tattoo 'industry', for lack of a better word. Mind you, that bottom rung doesn't only exist in Thailand – it extends to Bali, India and even Australia itself. Tattooing has exploded worldwide, and with it has arrived the charlatans and opportunists seeking the fast buck.

I'd also add that, in the context of this article, I'm not talking about traditional hand poke Buddhist prayer tattoos that are done at the temples by monks – I'm talking about western style tattooing done by non-religious tattoo artists.

I love Thailand. I've been there many times and tattooed on the beaches in the southern islands from my bungalow porch, but at the risk of sounding hypocritical, getting a large tattoo in Thailand is a bit like playing Russian roulette. To start with, there are so many shops operating now that you'd be hard-pressed not to stumble across one on a trip there, and like here, a large percentage of them are staffed by people with questionable skills. It doesn't take much to open a shop in Thailand – buy some gear, rent a spot and presto, you have a tattoo shop.

A lot of shops and artists over there have no qualms about using the tattoo pictures of famous artists to advertise their business, going so far as to fill their own portfolios with pictures by tattoo world luminaries and attempting to pass them off as their own. Young newcomers to tattooing can have no idea what they're getting themselves into or of the level of talent possessed by the person about to permanently mark their bodies.







Recently I had the pleasure of attending a car show out in the western suburbs of Sydney. I don't get out there much, so it was quite an eye opener to say the least. In the few hours I spent roaming the grounds spotting hotrods and drag cars, I saw the most amazing collection of shitty tattoos I have ever seen in my life. I'm talking guys with full sleeves of crappy tribal, crooked stars, botchy black and grey, distorted and incorrect Japanese – the list goes on and on. Plenty of these car enthusiasts had large crappy tattoos on their necks as their only visible ink to boot.

Who are the people doing these tattoos? Shouldn't they be held accountable for lowering tattooing to the gutter after some of us have tried so hard to make tattooing beautiful? Quite honestly, I was embarrassed to be tattooed that day, to be in the same visible category as these folks. I felt sad for tattooing and in a moment of clarity understood why tattooing is so reviled by the majority. Let's face it – straight-laced people don't get out much, so their contact with tattoos would be minimal, perhaps not stretching beyond glimpses in a shopping mall or parking lot here and there. If this level of work is the only contact most ordinary people have with tattoos – ugly renditions of popular styles scratched in the skin – then it's not too difficult to understand why the mainstream would think that tattoos are ugly, disgusting and vile.

If you care about tattoos, or think that tattoos should be more widely accepted and embraced as a legitimate art form, then give your business and your money to people that feel the same way and treat tattooing with respect. Whether it's here or abroad, take the time to find people that are tattooing for the love of the art and make sure you're getting the tattoo you deserve. The human body is truly a beautiful thing and to mar it with poorly drawn, haphazard work really is a travesty of the highest order. That shit is not coming off and will be with you forever, and a shit tattoo can really lower your stock in life.

For the penny-pinching traveller that wants to get a half sleeve or something similar in Bangkok on an overseas trip, make sure that you add it all up and that you are not participating in a false economy. One fellow I know over on the islands usually asks prospective clients how much they would pay in their own country for the tattoo and then slightly undercuts it – but not by much.

You won't be getting any free touch-ups either, if they are needed. We get a lot of unhappy people coming into the shop to get work they got in Thailand fixed up or recoloured, and most decent artists here don't want to even touch other people's work. Not only are you paying for a mess, you're unable to get someone of talent to make it right after you realise what you've done.

I have seen some great work come back from Thailand, but not nearly as often as I've seen train wrecks return on unsuspecting people who didn't get what they bargained for. Due diligence is the key to good tattooing. Know your artist by reputation and make sure the place is clean. You have to bear with the results for a long time and that money you saved will be long forgotten while the fruit of your scrimping lives on. Invest in yourself and reap the rewards. Happy 2011! ☺

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 17 years international experience and who specialises in traditional Japanese tattoo work and script lettering. He has worked all over world and has studied under some the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo in Surry Hills. His website is: [www.kianforreal.com](http://www.kianforreal.com) For information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal please visit [www.fadeyourtattoo.com](http://www.fadeyourtattoo.com)

