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X-PRESSIONS

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SKYEANN
GIGLIO

INTERVIEW WITH
TATTOO ARTIST
JERRY MAGNI

FEATURING

THE MISFITS
JEFFREE STAR
BLACK VEIL BRIDES
OLI SYKES
JOHNNY PLAGUE
LORI T
VIOLET EYES
SARAH MARTIN
SOFIE FATALE
LAUREN STARKILLER
MISA ROSE
ELIZABETH STEINLE
JENNIFER SIMS
and more.....

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YET!

AUTUMN BLISS



JERRY MAGNI

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Tell us about yourself...

I've had a great passion for drawing since childhood. Apparently at kindergarten I often preferred to stay by myself drawing than playing with other kids (and when I did I was beating them all LOL). Since I was a kid I knew I wanted to make a living out of drawing (at 13 I wanted to be an industrial designer) but my parents weren't very well-educated people, to them work was synonymous with sweat and they couldn't imagine I could make a living out of art, so they addressed me to studies that have nothing to do with designing or drawing. At 18 I decided to take my life into my own hands and I enrolled at the School of Comics. From then on I never stopped drawing. I've been a comic artist, illustrator, graphic and web designer; I did comics and illustrations for publishing, advertising and merchandising; canvases, websites, fonts, logos, corporate image and more, but tattoos were always present in the background, as if fate were strongly suggesting me a way and, even if a little bit later, that way became a highway. I like to spend my free time cultivating my talent, reading teaching books about light, anatomy, digital techniques and everything that can help become a better artist, as well as dedicating myself to alternative projects, to the cure of my body and mind and as much as I can to the girl I love.

How long have you been tattooing?

I started tattooing myself with a sewing needle at the age of 14/15 and later my friends asked me to do the same on them. This went on and off for a few years. When I enrolled at the School of Comics the requests increased because attending that school made me, in their eyes, even more appropriate to draw their tattoos but at that stage I was just an irresponsible kid who was pleasing his friends in exchange for some free beer or pizza. During the military service I spent more time tattooing than doing my soldier's duties and after that I was too busy working on comics and illustrations to work on tattoos that, until then, were just a sort of fun (and irresponsible) diversion. Around the middle 90s, after the spread of tattoo culture in Italy, the requests became pressing, it became a sort of hobby to make ends meet, so in 1995 I decided to buy all the necessary equipment to tattoo properly and safely. From then on it was a continuous crescendo that, after 10 years, made it become my main job. I opened my studio in 2005 and I regret not having done it sooner. Initially, even if I kept suggesting people to get unique pieces, I was also trying to satisfy each and every request, until one day I realized that I couldn't expect the quality of the requests to improve spontaneously; it was me who had to evaluate the quality and have the courage to say NO to some of them. From that awareness it was a crescendo of better and better works. So, if we were to consider my experience we can talk about 30 years but from my point of view I consider myself a formed tattoo artist from no more than 5 years.

Where did you hone your craft?

I learned by myself, through attempts and mistakes that luckily or thanks to my talent have never been too devastating and anyway always fixable. When I was a kid, during the 80s, I was tattooing recklessly with sewing needles. In Italy there was no tattoo culture. Maybe something was moving in a small underground world unknown to a little province kid like I was at the time. Back then in Italy it wasn't even imaginable that someone could make a living out of tattooing, therefore the idea of doing an apprenticeship was absolutely out of question. When in the middle 90s the interest in tattoos started increasing transforming it into a mass phenomenon, the great majority of those who were tattooing were in my same condition, especially in little towns like mine, we were learning by word of mouth or thanks to a number of magazines that we had never seen before in Italian news-stands. Most of the time the few "colleagues" were so jealous of "their" own technique that it was almost impossible to find someone willing to share it and considering the general quality available at that time it's probably better that I stayed by myself. So, unfortunately, I never had a teacher/mentor and considering the situation back then I didn't even look for one. I took advantage from the techniques learned at school and from the experience as a comic artist and illustrator. To me a tattoo artist is not that different from an illustrator, what changes are just tools and surface. Skin is definitely the most difficult surface to work on but if you are able to do something on paper or canvas you can definitely do it on skin, it's all about learning about materials and tools. If you can't do it on paper don't even think about doing it on skin.

When you have as many tattoos as you do, you're bound to have a few that aren't the best. If you're comfortably divulging this, what is the worst tattoo you have on yourself?

Unfortunately I have many horrible tattoos, due by ignorance, recklessness, levity, without thinking too much about what I was doing and why. The worst one is on my left arm, a big tribal from the wrist to the shoulder. 20 years ago, while helping a friend who wanted to learn how to tattoo, I accepted to be his "guinea pig", one of the worst things I've ever done in my life. Now I'm getting it removed with laser (getting tattooed compared to laser is a walk in the park) in order to get a new and amazing tattoo. Another one is on my hip. I did it when I was a kid with a sewing needle, I later had it covered-up but the result was so bad that I regret the first one. I would also get this one removed.

Unfortunately, especially during youth, we do a lot of things without thinking about the consequences, but the emotional and psychological impact of a tattoo can be extremely empowering or devastating and a cover-up or a laser removal are never pleasant. That's why before doing every tattoo I always ask: "Would you frame this and hang it on the best wall of your house?" If the answer is "NO" I invite the client to reconsider his project.

What is your tattoo style and how has it developed?

My style developed during the years, it's definitely a mix of my experiences as a comic artist, illustrator, tattoo artist and why not, even as graphic and web designer (one of the many activities I did in the past). Right now my style tends to realism but it's just due to clients' requests. I feel versatile enough to challenge almost every theme or graphic style. The style of an artist is simply his own. I don't feel like segregating myself into a single style: dark, horror, realism or else. To me all interesting requests are worth tackling. If an artist is doing realistic comics, that doesn't prevent him from doing cartoon, colored, black and grey or surreal comics. An artist who can draw is able to do anything and of course he will do it in his own style. The most personal style I've ever developed are definitely my KATZ but I don't have the perseverance nor the will to stop at a style as much as it's unique, after a while I get bored and I feel the need to move onto something new. To me every request that involves drawing something unique is more than welcome and if it's a challenge even better!

If you weren't a tattoo artist, what would you be doing?

Definitely something involving figurative art. Probably, I would still be in the comics or illustration industry or maybe I would be dedicating myself intensely to painting. From some time I've been feeling the urge to dedicate myself to sculpture, I haven't found the time to do it yet but it's something I will surely work on, sooner or later. Right now I would say sculpture, but some time ago I wanted to be an industrial designer, other times I would have loved to do cartoons. Figurative art per se is so versatile that if only I had the time and chance to do whatever I wanted I would experiment it in each and every one of its forms.

What do you consider success as a tattoo artist?

Success is the achievement of a task and tasks vary from person to person and change over time. As soon as you accomplish a goal you're ready for the next one.

For someone it may be opening his own shop, for others it may be traveling the world. Success changes its face whenever you reach it. I think that the top example for any individual business is a rock star or a very famous actor: being paid so much that you don't have to worry about bills anymore, having a cue of people willing to pay you millions to have your work, your face or your name on their products; invitations to events with first class flight and 5 star hotel included, your face on the most important magazines of the industry, millionaires disposed to pay you any amount of money to have your work or advice, with first class flight to the Seychelles and 5 star accommodation included and so on and so forth. But keeping my feet on the ground I think that success for a tattoo artist is knowing that he's doing a great job, making people who entrust their skin to you happy. Sure, having your work on magazines helps a lot, it makes you visible to potential clients who are maybe willing to travel to get your work, but basically success to me is knowing that tomorrow I will wake up happy, looking forward to working with enthusiasm on the next project and doing a work that is better than the last one. Being paid enough to live a worthy life and save up enough money to enjoy a worthy retirement is of course part of the game.

What is your least favorite tattoo-style or image to do?

There are many styles and things that I don't like but I don't worry about it too much since I turn down any image that I don't approve of artistically or stylistically. I obviously don't choose what tattoo the client has to get but if someone comes up to me with something that I don't feel like doing I address him/her to another tattoo artist who maybe can work on that image more passionately. I generally don't like to copy, if someone wants the portrait of a loved one rather than the sarcophagus of Tutankhamen there isn't much to choose from, but when a client brings images taken from Google asking me to do an exact copy I explain them my reasons and I try to make them change their mind, if I don't succeed I kindly tell them to look for another tattoo artist.

What makes you stand out from other tattoo artists out there?

In my quest I always feel that I can do better and this gives me the necessary humility to continue to improve. There are so many amazing artists that the idea of being able to stand out among many surprises me and honors me. But if I were to think of something that makes me stand out I think that must be the care and attention that I put into each project. Every Monday I offer free advice to anyone who wishes to discuss their tattoo with me; I like to spend time helping them find the best way to communicate their message. Some leave disappointed because I refuse to tattoo a date, a small logo or anyway something that in my opinion disfigures their body instead of making it more beautiful, but the majority of them appreciates the effort I put into understanding and translating their requests into images. I like to spend time to carefully study the design, lights, and suitable colors. Almost all of my tattoos are born first as illustrations and only when I'm fully satisfied do I proceed on skin. I like knowing that what I tattoo on people's skin is a translation of their thoughts and is not reproducible as everyone's skin is unique, and I like to think that tomorrow each of my clients will appreciate their own body even more thanks to my work.

Do you feel the need to be a positive role model considering the negative views towards tattooed people?

Honestly, maybe because I see a lot of tattooed people every day, I don't feel this kind of negativity towards tattoos.

Personally, I've never looked at tattoos as a form of rebellion against the system, for me it's simply a form of art. I don't use drugs, I don't drink, if not in rare occasions and definitely not to get wasted, and I try to give to my studio the same respectability that one can find at the optician's, at the doctor's or at a lawyer's office. Sometimes it happens that some elderly person gives me a few dirty looks when they see my tattoos but I don't care anymore, it even amuses me a little now. Honestly, it seems to me that tattoos here in Italy, despite being a rather recent phenomenon, are now accepted and I felt the same way in the small portion of world that I have visited. Of course there is still some resistance to the idea that a doctor, lawyer, police officer or bank clerk could have large visible tattoos but I think it's mainly due to the fact that there are too many ugly tattoos around. People get tattooed carelessly and often they are not decorating their body to make it more beautiful but are desecrating it with symbols, logos and horrible letterings. If tattoos were all of high quality I'm sure that the opinion of the people who don't approve of them would change drastically. I usually ask my clients what their relatives and family members think about them getting heavily tattooed and I usually receive negative feedback about this, mothers, grandmothers and girlfriends almost in tears, employers who don't approve of their choice or who are so upset as to threaten dismissal. When the tattoo is finished I ask once again what those people think about it and it's an enormous joy hearing about grandmothers who constantly ask to have a look at their nephew's or niece's tattoo because "It's so beautiful, I didn't imagine you were getting something like that" or disappointed employers who subsequently contact me to get tattooed themselves. These people think of tattoos as black signs, letterings, approximate decorations etc. Basically ugly designs. When they see what can be done on skin their opinion changes immediately and they are ecstatic. So I don't believe in the need of being a role model, I simply try to be a good person, its part of common sense, and if I have to make a difference in this sense I like to do it through my work.

