



Virgin Mary tattoo by Taipei studio Needle No. 8.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Taiwan ink

Body ink enthusiasts of all ages were drawn to the first Taiwan International Tattoo Convention

BY CATHERINE SHU
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Last weekend, the buzz of needles filled Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914創意文化園區) as tattoo lovers became living works of art.

The first Taiwan International Tattoo Convention (世界紋身精英博覽會) took place from July 31 to Aug. 1 and featured 140 booths with tattoo artists from seven countries, many of whom were busy inking clients over the weekend. Styles ran the gamut from photorealistic portraits to Thai Buddhist temple tattoos to designs inspired by Japanese art.

Kevin Li (利維鳴), owner of Kevin Tattoo (Kevin 紋身) in Ximending, organized the convention to raise the profile of tattooists in Taiwan, where body art is often linked with the criminal underworld in the popular imagination.

“We want to reverse negative stereotypes,” says Li. “People associate tattoos with gangsters, but people from many different backgrounds are into them.”

Most of the attendees at the fair were in their early 20s to mid-40s. Though the gender ratio skewed toward men, there were plenty of inked women, as well as small children tagging along with their parents and older siblings; some tots were treated to temporary tattoos drawn with felt markers. People who weren't getting tattooed watched burly wrestlers duke it out in a ring that was set up at one end of the exhibition hall.

Taiwanese tattoo artists do well at international conventions, says Li, but had no central gathering place back home. The last large-scale tattoo convention (held by different organizers) took place in 2005.

“Hopefully this convention will be a place for networking and it will open more opportunities for artists,” says Li.

Mr Sic Tin's tattoos, which cover his torso and arms, are inspired by his passion for West Coast hip-hop and Chicano culture (Tin runs an online music store at store.ruten.com.tw/music4u4life). Designs include Al Pacino from *Scarface* and a delicately shaded portrait of the Virgin Mary, all inked by tattoo artist Josh Lin (林立杰) of Taipei's Needle No. 8.

Taiwanese attitudes toward tattoos have changed over the past two or three years, says Tin (real name Chung Wei-ting, 鍾維庭). “More people see it as a personal expression and don't think it means anything bad.” When Tin is out

and about, however, he still gets curious stares. “It's unusual. You don't see many people with tattoos,” he says.

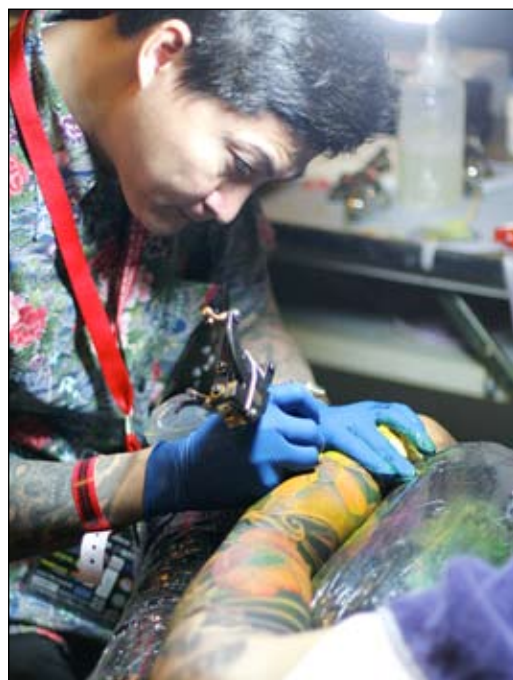
Many tattoo artists worked on paper before they switched to skin as their canvas. Frank Chi (施文浩) became fascinated with tattoos as a design student. Now he works for Taipei's Under Tattoo (地下紋身).

“I did a lot of sketching, so I started out drawing tattoo designs,” says Chi. “When I first saw tattoos, I thought ‘they're just like paintings.’”

Jason Stewart, who owns Shinto Tattoos in Geelong, Australia, says he's been into tattoos since he was 5 years old because both his parents were inked. Stewart got his first tattoo when he was 14 and now specializes in portraits. During the Taipei convention, he worked on a tattoo a day for clients who requested color portraits of their children.

“There's the value of the art that goes into it,” says Stewart. “It's like no other. It's on a living canvas. To see something that you've created moving around, that really hits you.”

On the Net: www.tattoo.tw



▲ Wu Shih-min of Taichung's Night Action Tattoo.

◀ A tattoo enthusiast shows off his body art.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



Artist Diau-An of Kaohsiung's Diau-An tattoo studio inks a client.

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