

# THE ART OF COMMITMENT

BY FIDA CHAABAN

HADY BEYDOUN KNOWS COMMITMENT IMPLICITLY. WHEN RAGMAG WANTED TO TALK ABOUT UNORTHODOX WAYS THAT PEOPLE SHOW THEIR COMMITMENT TO ONE ANOTHER, WE WENT TO LEBANON'S VERSION OF MIAMI INK. WE SPENT A COUPLE OF DAYS HANGING OUT WITH HADY AND TALKED TO HIM ABOUT COMMITMENT, LOVE AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS GO WRONG.

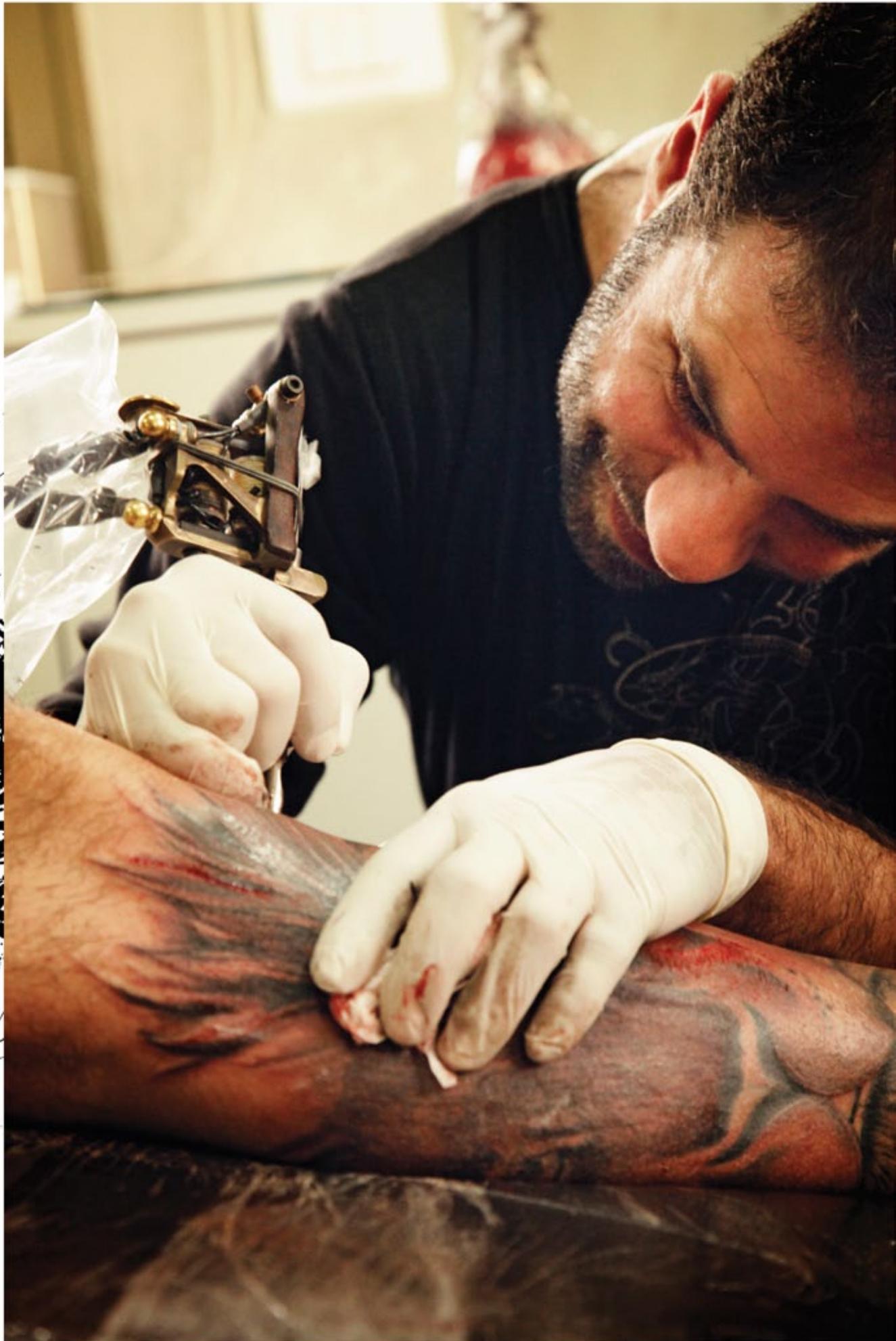
## HADY BEYDOUN'S TRAMP STAMPS



**‘JUST BECAUSE YOU BREAK UP WITH SOMEONE, DOESN’T MEAN IT’S A MISTAKE THAT YOU TATTOOED YOURSELF WITH THEIR NAME’**

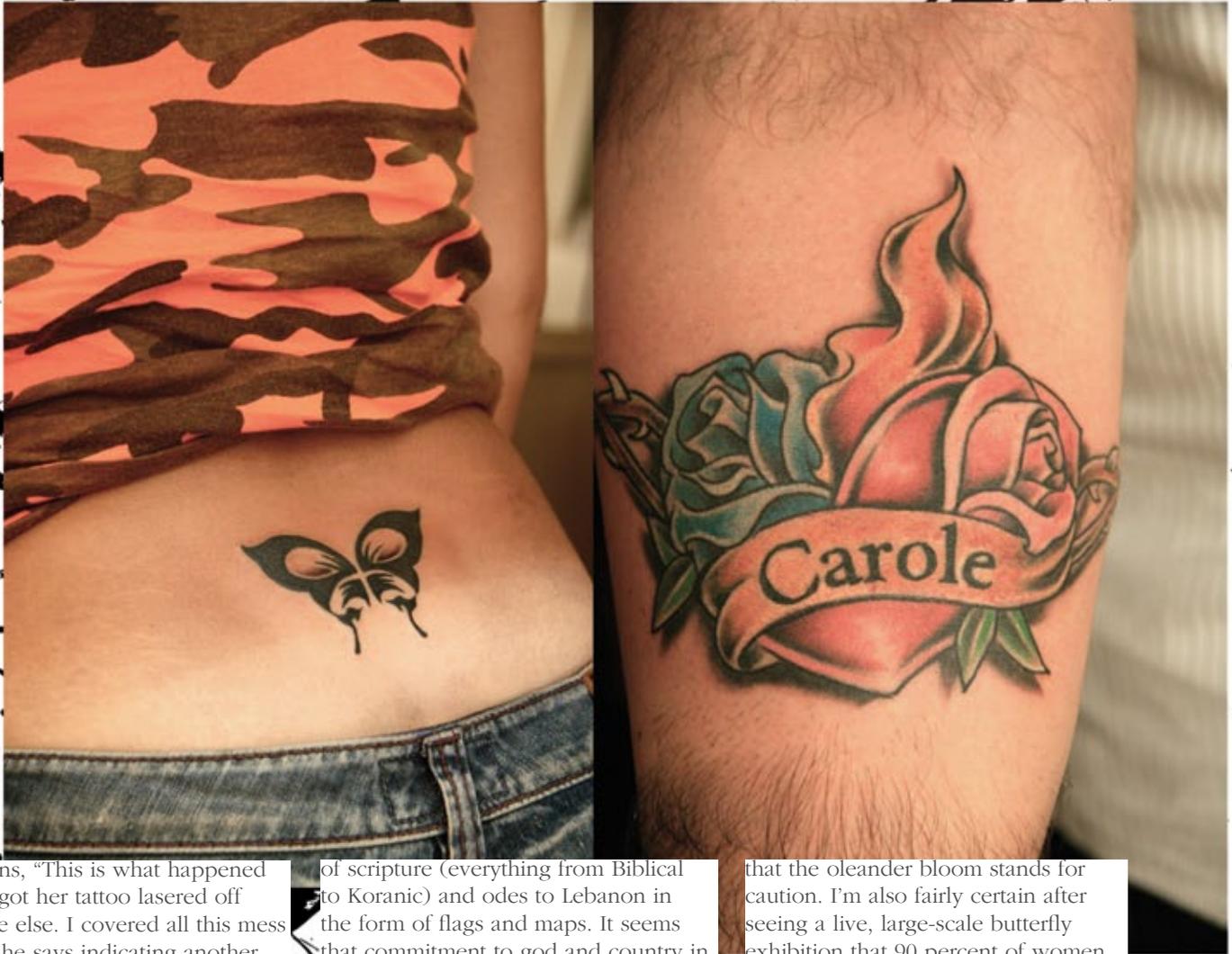
Just because you break up with someone, doesn't mean it's a mistake that you tattooed yourself with their name," he counters as I flip through one of at least 30 albums documenting his work. "Just like these relationships may have left an emotional scar, a wound or a fond memory, you have the tattoo. It is an outward symbol of what has happened in your life," he explains with the philosophical outlook of a yogi. I begin to quiz Hady about his own tattoos; he doesn't have even one dedicated to a woman? "No. I've tattooed a lot of my ex-girlfriends, but not with my name," he clarifies. That's not surprising since Hady is reputed as the best tattoo artist in Lebanon with clients from all over the Middle East. Did he love his ex-girlfriends? "Yes, why not? I just never felt the need to tattoo their names on me. Probably if it would have stood the test of time I would have."

I notice he's done a slew of biker hearts in different sizes and colours, what does he think of them? "I suggest that one often, it's nice," he says simply. I'm not sure I think biker hearts are "nice" but I do think its retro-cool and kitschy. So what do people get, relationship-wise? "Everything. Names, dates, portraits, symbols." As I look for name tattoos I am floored to see a picture of a tattoo I just saw this summer at a popular Beirut beach. I had approached the bearer and asked if he and his tattooed "Lama" were still together, as I took a closer look at the name and date etched into his upper arm. "No, I hate her. I hate her so much," he said staring hard at me. Ohhhkay then, I nodded awkwardly. I share this story with Hady and he smiles and shrugs, "Who cares? He can get it covered if he hates her that much." Can you get tattoos lasered off completely? Hady shows me a photo of a particularly angry looking ankle ▶



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and explains, “This is what happened when she got her tattoo lasered off somewhere else. I covered all this mess with this,” he says indicating another photograph of a fresh tattoo. The tattoo artist works in mixed media as well, with a large portfolio that ranges from building-sized ad campaigns, live painting performances, sculpture and functional furniture. You name it, and Hady has done it. “You know when I started in 1995 there were very few tattoo artists in Lebanon. It wasn’t really common.” His large scale, spray paint and airbrush campaigns are widely coveted, as are his commissioned private collector pieces. In his tattoo albums, I see yet another form of commitment: Depictions of countless religious symbols, excerpts

of scripture (everything from Biblical to Koranic) and odes to Lebanon in the form of flags and maps. It seems that commitment to god and country in permanent body tattoos are as popular as love stories. What does he think of this? “Everything means something to someone or else they wouldn’t get it, don’t you agree?” I don’t agree actually, mentally reflecting on the tattoos I’ve seen on the lower backs of women everywhere. The colloquial “tramp stamp” is often things like butterflies and flowers and insofar as that, I see it as a common trend, like wearing big handbags. I don’t see the deep significance and commitment in these tattoos, other than the bearer is stuck with it for life. I can bet my salary that most people tattooed with flowers can’t tell me

that the oleander bloom stands for caution. I’m also fairly certain after seeing a live, large-scale butterfly exhibition that 90 percent of women inked with that particular bug haven’t interacted with one, not willingly anyway. Lepidopterology, the study of butterflies and moths, would perhaps encourage one to have it tattooed on their lower back, but chances are not a single one of those tramp-stamped women has an expertise in the field or a deep scholarly commitment to the subject. Hady is ambivalent, “Sometimes people expect me to choose for them. I don’t know them so how can I choose?” he asks rhetorically. Agreed. Inking a tattoo of his choice on a client would be, in essence, a lifelong commitment ■