

The Monthly interviews

HADY BEYDOUN



In today's fast society, art starts to grow in several professions, sometimes taking controversial functions and forms. One of these controversies would be the world of Tattoo, that remains prone to both avid appreciation and social rejection. The Monthly interviews Hady Beydoun, tattoo artist, in an inquiry about his career.

How did your career start?

It all started when I was about 13 years old. I had this urge to stand out from my schoolmates. I identified with rock music while everybody was into FM music, and delved into its lyrics and its magazines such as "metal hammer" and "smash hits". I was inspired by how rock stars look, so I adopted their clothing style from torn jeans to colorful T-shirts, which brought me the attention I was seeking, and that was rewarding.

During the Lebanese War, I visited a store that sold Bon Jovi T-shirts and I really wanted to buy one of them although they were quite expensive at that time. Unable to afford it, my mother offered me paint and some brushes instead so I could paint my own T-shirt. Since it was this offer or the highway, I reluctantly accepted and made my own first shirt. For the next three years, I painted more T-shirts for friends and friends of friends. The circle grew larger, so one of my "customers" had brought me a tattoo design magazine that I looked into. I was intrigued and thrilled by the idea of painting under the skin, because mistakes are not allowed.

I spent a whole year researching tattoos and I built a good background on the practice. I also built my visual education majoring in Graphic Design at the American University of Beirut. During my studentship, I traveled to London, purchased the tattoo equipment and started my tattoo experience in Lebanon. Tattooing was easy for me. I knew how to use my colors, highlights, shades and practiced rigorously.

I was painting since I was 14. I have been working in tattoos since 1995 and I have worked with airbrushing since 2002. Airbrushing to me is the magic tool, I could use it on a barrel, a motorcycle, a can, a wall, leather, anything. So this sums up my career.

What is a tattoo and why do people get it?

A tattoo is a visual representing a statement. It is nothing like a sticker, although sometimes I am forced to treat it as such upon the customer's request. It is a visual that follows the curves of the body so that when the body changes, the tattoo follows its course.

When it comes to its personal significance, the tattoo is similar to a person's selection of his/her style of clothes, jewelry or

car. It adds to the amount of things - some deliberate, some spontaneous- that say something about this individual. This method of expression can be specific when it comes to the term, design or statement that you select to paint on your skin. For example, some people choose to get a cartoon character as a tattoo, some choose a butterfly, others choose a laughing face, etc.

How do you describe your profession today?

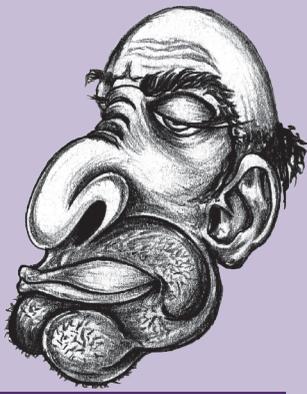
A tattoo is a universal language at the end of the day just like a picture is a universal language. Each visual gives away an impression that reaches its viewer, regardless of age and culture. Of course, I realize that there are people who frown upon tattooing just like there are others who appreciate it.

As a practice, tattooing has a certain edge to me. Its thrill never changes. The danger of making a mistake remains intact despite how many times I paint. In the tattoo world, they say that "you are as good as your last tattoo", which is why I face the challenge of giving my 100% every time.

On the other hand, every tattoo I paint on someone is like my signature or my business card. I can't afford to make it look any less than perfect.

Who are your clients?

Anybody who has something to say, from any age and any social class. I receive 16 year olds just like I receive 60 year olds. Today is different from the 80's when tattooed people were marginalized by society. With the era of development, technology and media, we can now rely on visuals for our daily communication.



Uncle Smith, a character designed by Hady Beydoun

Do you have taboo subjects?

Yes, of course. I do not go into politics in tattooing, in painting, or in design. I do not believe that art, an expression of freedom and truth can mix with politics, which revolves around hiding the truth and manipulating it. I also do not address negative and spiteful statements towards religion.

In addition to tattooing, you also have a career in technical painting, brushing, sculpting, etc. Can you tell us about your other artistic endeavors?

It seems that I have a lot to say and a lot of questions. I use my art as a way to identify with my present state and answer questions. The variety of these endeavors is also a continuous challenge I find most exciting to take on, when the motive presents itself. For example, coming face to face with many ideas I took for granted made me question the existence of God, the mortality of those I cherish and of my own body, my perception of women, and even the way I perceived myself. When I couldn't answer these questions I made these can sculptures that expressed the way I felt, crumpled and empty, but still bearing a message of hope. I tried to depict the woman's body and its aesthetic difficulties, and also tried technical painting and expanded my airbrushing abilities.



Don't give up can airbrushed wood sculpture

Have you done any commissioned paintings?

Yes, I have done several paintings for restaurants such as Crepaway, Dunkin Doughnuts, Little Italy, Atlantis, and others. I have also been asked to paint house interiors. I have done a lot of advertising work for William Lawson's, Halls, and others.

Can you tell us about the characters you have created?

I served in the Army in 1999, and I was living 24/7 with the type of people I never run into in my life. To

Tattoos have become more accepted and are now judged by their quality not by their mere existence. They are now recognized as a form of art so people can differentiate between a good tattoo and a bad one.

me, training, sharing meals and living day in and day out in the same hangar with 300 other people was an entirely new experience. It made me realize that they have a completely different skin. I was inspired by their physical appearance, their behavior and perception, so I took a drawing pad with me and started sketching their appearances. I selected a few of them according to their difference of perception and placed them in a parallel world, each holding a strong trait and tried to imagine the conversation that they would have if they were in the same room. To me, the significance of this project was a way to seek an absolute definition of certain topics, such as happiness. The conversation that these characters would have is the series of questions that I would think of concerning this topic. When these questions are asked through their voice instead of mine, they gain a certain level of objectivity and render a different perspective from my own.

Do you ever think all the happiness you find in your profession might subside, forcing you to drop everything you have built?

You can never really predict what you may decide to do. Although I had always dreamt of being a musician, today my main day-to-day work is tattooing, which is actually very time-consuming. I sometimes find that the world we are living in has reached a point where our most perfect reality is shaped by the Western media. Everybody dreams of being a rock star a movie star, or a millionaire but not many of these people will turn out to be that, and so many do not find happiness.

Quoting the Bible: "What good does it do a man if he gains the world and loses himself?" Sometimes, this continuous strive to find such fake happiness tires me and I refer to my trip to countries of the East. Entering Nepal or India is penetrating a world that hasn't bought into what the West has sold us as "happiness". People are fulfilled and happy even if they have no wealth and fame and they just accept each other and merge into a harmonious picture of peace. If one day I can leave all the achievements I created and all the competition in this part of the world for a more harmonious world like Nepal, it would be a most beautiful day to me.

