



It's a privilege to catch up with Neil at the Dublin Tattoo Convention, he who is of some premier tattoo magazines in circulation, Tattoo Master & Skin Deep, as well as the man who makes convention Tattoo Jam happen in North Wales every year. He's got an insiders' perspective on the scene, an engagingly positive attitude and praise for our my hometown convention to boot: "Each time you come to the Dublin show it gets better and better... it's in a much nicer venue and it's got an increasingly international guest list of artists."

The subject of a genuine 'camaraderie' amongst artists returning, brings a positive response: Maybe it was the economic boom that led to shops losing touch, but there's also undoubtedly always been an atmosphere of secrecy and unwillingness to open up on the tricks of the trade between ink artists – Neil uses the example of how two tattoo artists might have businesses only a street away from each other and not swap a word for decades.

Whether it's a return or a brand new occurrence, or most likely a blend of the two, what's for certain is that there's movement towards increasing openness and amicability between tattoo professionals, and this is what Neil is most eager to enthuse about. There's a multitude of reasons why; as the line between artist and tattoo artist blurs, the historical tattoo traditions of east and west design are taken, pulled apart, innovated and reconstructed anew, and ink-artwork expands in every imaginable direction, from cartoons to portraiture, photorealism, colour, shade, line, light & perspective. Neil is of course a major advocate of all this newness and inspiration, and he believes the best way to keep it going is, of course, communication.

Thus we have his specialist artists-only publication, the quarterly Tattoo Master, full of advice, hints, tips & tricks to enrich the body modification industry and encouraging tattooers and artists to push at their boundaries and progress. More easily found is Skin Deep Magazine, which aims to open the eyes of the public about exactly what can be done with tattoos and tattooing, and how vastly diverse the practice is becoming.

There is also, as he notes, the increased popularity of providing seminars and workshops for artists at tattoo conventions – something quite spectacular in an industry that only years ago was defined by its' small circles and fear of any competition whatsoever.

Neil of Skin Deep Magazine Discusses the Camarderie of Artists - Tattoo.TV

Written by Rachel Kennedy

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Now Neil sees seminars, workshops & painting classes all over the states, including several at what he thinks is the 'best convention he's ever been to,' Paradise Tattoo at Albany, New York. He even holds an artist only day for the Friday of his own convention, Tattoo Jam, which packs in a solid tattooers' curriculum during the day and even a 'Tattoo masters' ball in the evening to get everyone socialized and friendly before the weekend launches.

Neil also makes note of the way that lines between artistry and tattooing are blurring causing much more variation, and encouraging niches, which perhaps also had an influence on the increased acceptance of artists between themselves. It's something that's getting through to the public too, thanks to shows like Miami Ink and London Ink. There are more custom shops springing up, and increased customer collaboration, which is great for creativity and individuality. Neil notes that he hasn't seen two people with the same tattoo since he can remember, which is impressive considering his line of work immerses him in the scene on a daily basis.

There's still a stigma around where tattoos and tattoo culture is involved, but it's breaking down very fast and partially escaping the 'sub-culture' tag; tattooing being seen as much more varied. There's definitely still a taste for some truly awful tattoos out there, however, as he notes; the funniest tattoo he has ever seen was the winner of a 'worst tattoo competition' in the states, a leg upon which was rendered an badly drawn shark with a unicorn's head and a large penis, busily spitting daggers at a cat. I don't really know if I can picture it properly, either...

Overall, Neil feels the most significant change on the scene in the past few years is "the new sense of openness, fallen walls, the tattooists who used to be neighbours refusing to talk for twenty years are now swapping stories, tips and techniques...which has led us to a worldwide raising of the bar; graphic designers, fine artists are coming into the scene bringing realism and portraiture to a far higher standard" – a very happy stroke of fortune, as for Neil "anything that improves the quality of the tattoos is all good!" Some closing words - "Skin Deep Magazine wholly endorses Tattoo TV!"

[□ www.skindeep.co.uk](http://www.skindeep.co.uk)

[□ www.tattoomaster.co.uk](http://www.tattoomaster.co.uk)

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