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Passing trends, permanent art

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Meredith Kestel is dancing around to Kanye West's "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" in a studio above the heart of Ames. She looks over her shoulder in the mirror at the tattoo stencil of a moon in purplish-black ink positioned on her upper-left back. "I love this so much and it's not even permanently on my body!"

"Yet," her tattoo artist, Daniel Forrester, reminds her as he is preparing his tattooing equipment. Forrester is a resident tattoo artist and founder of InkBlot in Ames. He has been tattooing longer than Kestel has been walking and talking — approximately 20 years.

This is not Kestel's first tattoo, but this will be the first time five people will be watching and recording every second of her experience. As part of research for this story on tattoo trends, she agreed to get a tattoo based on popular tattoo design styles. Earlier, she and Forrester sat down to discuss her plan for her tattoo. As she described her potential tattoo, he pulled out a clipboard and began jotting down ideas.

"Alright, so what are we tattooing on you, lady?" asks Forrester.

"A moon," replies Kestel.

"A moon?"

"Yeah kind of like we talked before," she says, "Hey Moon" was very influential to me...that album plus I've always just been hugely into space I've been to space camp three times."

Aside from the drunken "I-lost-a-bet-with-my-roommate ass tattoos," most designs have considerable thought put into them. Kestel planned out her tattoo with two main themes: space and music. The moon design was loosely based on the album cover art for the band Bad Bad Hat's debut album.

"Everyone gets tattoos for the same reason — because they want to. Really. We are all very self-absorbed," says Forrester.

Millennials have been embracing the art once reserved for sailors, inmates and members of motorcycle gangs. Tattoos have now become woven into pop culture, and design trends are growing exponentially with the help of social media.

"Passing Trends, Permanent Art"

BY HANNAH OLSON
DESIGN MIA TIRIC
PHOTOGRAPHY SAM GREENE
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Placement Trends

The placement of tattoos may not be the first thing you think of when it comes to tattoo planning, but it is very important. Aside from certain places being more visible, some body parts are more sensitive than others, making tattoos more painful. Kestel planned to have her tattoo on her upper left back, partly due to its size, and to complement the other tattoos already on her back.

“It’ll be up kind of on the backside of my ribs,” says Kestel.

“Left back like below your shoulder blade?” asks Forrester.

She hesitates, “It’s been awhile since I’ve gotten a rib tattoo, so if I cry—” I’ll enjoy it,” he interjects.

Over the last decade, tattoos have become more socially acceptable and generally more acceptable in the workplace. Bob Parr, tattoo artist at Jaded Angel in Ames says, “You can see a worker at Hy-Vee with a blue face tattoo and nobody’s fazed.”

This is due in part to social media. Artists have a new platform to share their tattoos, and a demographic that may not ordinarily see their work can come across it on Facebook or Pinterest.

Forrester credits reality television shows such as, Ink Master and Tattoos After Dark, to the declining tattoo stigma. These shows have provided a platform for tattoo artists outside of the typical clientele. “They have absolutely become more socially acceptable over the last decade. Soccer moms get to watch it on TV, and it’s acceptable. Thank God for soccer moms.”

This trend in tattoo tolerance has led to an increase in visible tattoos. Hand and finger tattoos have become especially popular on sites like Pinterest and Instagram. The trend is delicate and subtly visible, and not in your face—literally—like a face tattoo would be. What many don’t realize, is that hand and finger tattoos fade much faster than tattoos on other body locations.

Parr said that hand and finger tattoos “can be difficult,” and that he usually provides a disclaimer warning about the possibility of fading. “We can’t always predict how they are going to turn out,” he says, “but if we don’t do them, someone else will.”

Design Trends

According to Forrester, tattoo designs haven’t changed since the dawn of the tattoo industry.

Nevertheless, tattoo styles have been circulated around sites like Instagram and Pinterest. Parr notes that many come in with pictures from these sites, and his issue with this is a lot of these images are altered or not actual tattoos.

When it comes to originality in tattoos and his feelings toward copying tattoos from social media, Forrester says, “I’m worried about my own reputation and my own morals.”

Kestel’s moon tattoo was planned with a minimalistic style. Forrester referenced a more detailed drawing of the moon and then shaded the craters with dots and lines to simplify it. Her tattoo was also influenced by pop culture, as it was based off of music that was important to her.

“Well, so what’s your concept here?” asks Forrester.

“Very simple…”

“So do you want it to be mostly lines and dots?”

“Yeah, very geometric, nothing like super layered.”

“Do you want this to be basic as in simple or basic as in white girl?” he jokes.

Minimalism

On the rise in the fashion world, minimalism is taking over the lives of college students. Tattoos involving lines and dots, geometric designs and black and white are all the rage. Minimalistic tattoos usually consist of simple black line designs with little to no added detail.

Watercolor

On the other end of the spectrum are colorful watercolor tattoos. Watercolor tattoos have a fun, delicate style that mimics watercolor paint. Watercolor tattoos lack harsh lines which help the ink to appear painted on the skin.

Unfortunately, watercolor tattoos fade faster than other tattoo styles, making many artists reluctant to do them.

Pop Culture References

With Netflix becoming a human need on par with food and water and fandoms slowly taking over the lives of millennials, it’s only natural to want to pull tattoo ideas from pop culture. With new TV shows and movies, the style may appear new but Forrester says, “I did ‘Deathly Hallows’ symbols back in 2007— it’s nothing new.”

Forrester says, “Tattoo artists kind of have this saying, ‘everybody gets the tattoo they deserve, so if you get a really standard, common, mediocre tattoo, you probably asked for it.” In the end, it doesn’t really matter what you get tattooed on you.
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