

TATTOO

armed forces



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TATTOO REGULATIONS

in the Military

The military used to be particularly strict about tattoos. However, in recent years, the service branches have loosened restrictions and are increasingly accepting tattoos as a societal norm. If you are an active-duty service member and are considering getting a tattoo, be sure to inform yourself of the rules and regulations. Here is an overview of current military tattoo policies:

ACCEPTABLE

All branches

- No limit—in number or size—for tattoos on the chest, torso, arms, legs and feet.
- One ring tattoo.

Army

- One tattoo on the back of the neck, not to exceed two inches in any direction.
- One tattoo behind each ear, not to exceed one inch in any direction.
- One tattoo on each hand, not to exceed one inch in any direction. No limit to tattoos between fingers that are not visible when hands are closed.
- Permanent facial makeup that adheres to grooming standards.

Air Force

- One tattoo per hand not exceeding one inch.
- A single tattoo on the back of the neck or behind the ear, not exceeding one inch.
- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.
- Permanent facial makeup that adheres to grooming standards.

Marine Corps

- Ultra violet tattoos are allowed as long as they follow all standards.

Navy

- Any number and size of tattoos on hands.
- One tattoo on the neck or behind the ear,

not to exceed one inch in any direction.

- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.
- Sailors with sleeve tattoos can now be assigned to Recruiting Command positions and Recruit Training Command.

Space Force

- One tattoo on the back of the neck or behind an ear that does not exceed one inch in any direction.
- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.
- Permanent facial makeup that adheres to grooming standards.

Coast Guard

- One inch tattoo behind the ears.
- One back of hand tattoo not to exceed 2.5 inches.

PROHIBITED

All Branches:

- Tattoos are prohibited on the head, scalp, tongue or face.
- Content must not be indecent, sexist, racist, obscene, extremist, gang-related, overtly sexual, discriminatory, incite violence or represent an organization that does.

Army:

- No tattoos on the front of the neck, or front of ears.

Air Force:

- No tattoos above the open collar on the head, neck or face.

Marine Corps:

- No tattoos above the seventh vertebrae on the back or above the collarbone on the chest.
- No head, neck or hand tattoos.
- Crew neck t-shirts are required if a tattoo is visible in a V-neck shirt.
- Certain duties still prohibit full sleeve or full leg tattoos due to interaction with and sensitivity to other cultures.

Navy:

- Tattoos cannot be visible through Whites.

Space Force:

- No tattoos on the front of the neck, front of ears, or hands beyond the allowed ring tattoos.
- Chest or back tattoos cannot be visible through any uniform.

Coast Guard:

- No visible tattoos above the line of a crew neck t-shirt in the front.
- No visible tattoos above the line of a standard blue tropical shirt in the back.



©militarytimes.com

2024 was a landmark year for tattoos in the U.S. Army when Captain Isis Sake, originally from Apia, Samoa, received a waiver for her traditional Samoan hand tattoos. These tattoos, or “malu” as they are known in Samoa, are hand-poked by a Samoan tattoo artist, and symbolize her selfless service. She received her first malu back in 2017, on her legs, however, it was her hand tattoos that fell outside of the regulations in 2022. She was counseled and sought out the waiver, approved earlier this year. ■

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Try On These TATTOO STYLES

By Tamala Malerk and Stripes Staff

Tattoos used fall into one of two categories: color or monochrome. As more inks, machines and techniques became available, tattoo artwork expanded. Today, there are countless varieties. Here are some modern and unique styles that have emerged over the years.

Trash Polka®

As we are stationed in Europe, it makes sense to highlight a style that was created here. Trash Polka® is a brand and tattoo style created in the late 1990s by Volker Merschky and Simone Pfaff in Germany. This style uses a blend of black ink with splashes of red, and combines surrealism and naturalism in art.

Japanese Irezumi

Some say that Irezumi dates back almost 10,000 years. Using an array of colors, Irezumi tattoos tell stories from Japanese history and feature waves, dragons, warriors, "kirins" and smokey patterns. Today, there is a controversial association since members of the Yakuza have Irezumi tattoos. However, as more young people get these tattoos, and as time goes on, the association with criminality has lessened.

Cybersigilism

These tattoos look very similar to the tribal tattoos that donned many biceps in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, these tattoos with their mix

of thin lines and sharp angles are a more recent emergence on men and women all over the body. The style emerged before the name, which was given to it by tattoo artist, Noel Garcia.

Geometrical

These tattoos can be traced back to ancient Greeks, Mayans or Egyptians. They are known for their geometric shapes and symmetry. There are also different meanings behind the various shapes: Circles represent wholeness and unity while triangles and hexagons represent balance and harmony.

Patchwork or Embroidery

These are some of the newest tattoos to appear on the scene with reports of them first being seen in Latin America in 2017. The tattooing technique creates the visual effect that the artwork has been embroidered onto the skin.

Kawaii

Kawaii isn't just a tattoo style, but an entire culture in Japan that was popularized in the 1970s due to the creation of the Hello Kitty brand. Kawaii is all about cute, cuddly, bright and sparkly: think fuzzy animals, cartoons, sparkles and hearts. In kanji, Kawaii translates to "able to be loved, can or may love, lovable."



Biomechanical

Biomechanical tattoos date back to the late 1970s and early 1980s in part because of Swiss artist H.R. Giger's artwork. Biomechanical tattoos create the illusion that mechanical parts are a part of the human body, no matter where on the skin the tattoo is located. Skin that appears to tear and reveal mechanical parts underneath are a popular choice for this style.

Negative Space Tattoos

This style encompasses a variety of styles including Polynesian, minimalistic, geometric and Celtic and its origins date back hundreds of years. This style is more about what isn't inked on the skin rather than what is.

Watercolor

Watercolor tattoos date back to the 20th century but didn't rise in popularity until the 1980s and 1990s. With brilliant color gradients to create the effect of watercolor paintings, these pieces are often bold and unique. Some designs use black lines to create the primary image and use the color as an afterthought or to create a splattering paint effect. Others may not use black ink at all and have the colors blend into each other for a painted feel.

Neo Traditional

Neo Traditional tattoo styles emerged in the 1970s and they twist Americana (American Traditional) artwork by using non-conventional colors and a mash-up of abstract and classical designs. ■

Behind the Lens



Master Sergeant (MSG) Germán R. Rodríguez Peña is the photographer for this edition of "Tattoo Armed Forces."

MSG Rodriguez, a native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, joined the Army in October 2003 and attended Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Jackson, SC

where he graduated as a Human Resource Information System Management Specialist (42F). He is currently working on his Associate's Degree in Multidisciplinary Studies and a Bachelor's Degree in Sports and Health Science.

He has been stationed in Germany where he has worked as the 5th Military Police CID Battalion Senior Human Resources Sergeant, the 21st STB G1 Plans and Operations NCOIC, in the 16th Special Troops Battalion as a Platoon Sergeant in 569th HR Company and currently is working as the Senior Human Resources Sergeant in the 16th Sustainment Brigade Support Operations Human Resource Operation Branch.

His hobbies include traveling and dancing, running and hiking and aspires to be a professional photographer after retirement.



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Gen Tattooed

How Different Generations Navigate Getting Inked

By Tamala Malerk

I got my first tattoo in 2010, and, like many American millennials, I made sure it could be easily hidden under my shirt, safely positioned on the right side of my upper back. While tattoos weren't necessarily forbidden then, it was assumed that a potential employer spotting one could up your chances of being "non-hirable." It wasn't until July 2024, when getting inked for the 18th time, that I got my first not-so-easy to cover tattoo that branches down my forearm.

Thankfully, within the last decade, societal and workplace views towards body art have changed significantly. Tattoos are not as stigmatized as they once were, and even people in older generations, beyond the Veterans and bikers who were already getting inked, are joining in on the fun.

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Your Tattoo Trends

In trend with the rest of society, tattooed millennials had the largest response, **83%**. This is followed by Gen Z **10%** and Gen X **7%**.

Your top two favorite tattoo styles: **black-and-grey** (or white) and **American traditional**.

30% of you have more than **20** tattoos!

Our highest response was from the **Kaiserslautern Military Community** in Germany.

13% responded from outside of Germany.

The youngest age for a first tattoo was **15**; the oldest was **36**.

Our oldest respondent was **47** years old.

Figures are based on the 2024 Tattoo Armed Forces Model Questionnaire.



Millennials are the most tattooed generation with **47%** of people getting inked, while Gen X trails close behind with **32%**

The cultural change may be attributed to the younger generations, particularly millennials and Gen Z. These are the most tattooed age groups. As of 2023, they make up 40 percent of the modern workforce, are promoting in their jobs (where they may be able to dictate what they wear and what tattoos may be seen) and may no longer wish to swelter at the office in long sleeves during the summertime heat. Perhaps the rise in hybrid and remote work has also made it easier for people to get inked themselves because they aren't as pressured to hide their body art.

Even the strictest of military branches no longer impede talented individuals from joining their ranks because of tattoos. With every young, new recruit, the generational demographics of the armed forces change: Gen Z makes up the largest portion of the armed forces.

In 2022, Gen Z made up 42 percent of the Army, 41 percent of the Navy, 65 percent of the Marine

Corps, 38 percent of the Air Force and 26 percent of the Space Force (Defense Manpower Data Center). With demographics like that, the military attitude toward tattoos must keep up with societal norms in order to continue recruiting talent.

Whatever the reasons for more cultural and social acceptance, as a tattooed individual who committed herself to long pants at the office in 2014, I became interested in learning about tattoos and tattoo culture across the different generations.

It's no secret that many in the baby boomer generation associated tattoos with shady characters, fringe members of society and Sailors. Younger generations do not seem to have those connotations.

When older generations get tattoos, there is a tendency to do so with intention and meaning, or as a form of rebellion. Whereas, younger generations get symbolic, meaningful tattoos and get tattooed as a form of identity projection or art collection.

A Quick Guide to Generations

Baby Boomers

Born 1946-1964

Millennials

Born 1981-1996

Gen X

Born 1965-1980

Gen Z

Born 1997-2012

Millennials are the most tattooed generation with 47 percent of people getting inked, while Gen X trails close behind with 32 percent (Statista). However, those who fall under Gen Z's current age demographic includes many people aged 12-17, too young for legal tattooing in most places. Even so, 23 percent are currently tattooed, meaning they may one day surpass tattooed millennials. The baby boomer generation trails behind everyone, with only 13 percent being tattooed.

It's not just who is tattooed, but what they ink on their bodies that differentiates between the generations. While baby boomers are not the most adorned, they paved the path with getting American traditional tattoos (which can be easily hidden, of course). The Gen X trend was getting ankle and lower back tattoos, particularly tribal designs, dolphins, owls, butterflies, names and, I can only speak colloquially about this, I saw a lot of cherries on upper backs and suns around belly buttons at the beach in the 1990s.

Millennials have jumped all in. 29 percent of millennials have more than one tattoo (Statista). They tend to get larger, intricate and bolder pieces, even if they wait until later in life to get them, like one particular writer. Millennials also lean towards infinity symbol, dreamcatcher and pop culture tattoos.



While baby boomers are not the most adorned of the group, they paved the path with getting American traditional tattoos



Whereas millennials get larger pieces, Gen-Zer's have jumped on the micro tattoo trend. They even have their own generational micro tattoo: a "Z" that is making the rounds on the TikTok app. They also place their tattoos in more subtle places including behind the ears and inner parts of the finger. Popular designs amongst this generation include sparkle designs, bows, angel numbers and fine-line script.

From dolphins to dreamcatchers, each generation has its own way of expressing themselves and what is meaningful to them. No matter the generation, it seems that tattoos aren't going anywhere anytime soon. ■



Getting INKED

by a celebrity tattoo artist

By Tamala Malerk

In 2012, I was in college, working a part-time job and living with my mom who was working her own full-time job. This meant that our schedules never really matched up to be home at the same time. The one exception was Tuesdays at 10 p.m. This began a small tradition of sitting together to watch this new reality show, "Ink Master."

Originally hosted by Jane Addiction's guitarist, Dave Navarro and judged by Oliver Peck and Chris Nunez, "Ink Master" has produced 15 seasons, endured behind-the-scenes scandals causing the removal of Peck and Nunez, spanned two spin-off shows and survived a network owner change as well as a move to streaming services. Current seasons are now hosted by Good Charlotte's Joel Madden and have been judged by varying combinations of former Ink Master winners Ryan Ashley Malarkey and DJ Tambe as well as tattoo artists Nikko Hurtado and Ami James.

Eventually, I moved out of my mom's house, and our tradition ended. However, I recently had the opportunity to binge the latest season with my mom (okay I may have watched it once before without her; sorry, mom). For the first time, in all of the 15 seasons, I not only loved the art but fell in love with a particular artist's style: Freddie Albrighton from England who ended up in second place in the competition.

Albrighton's blend of reality, graffiti artistry, surrealism and creativity simply blew me away. I began following him on Instagram and through what can be called simply luck and fate, he opened his diary (tattoo appointment calendar) for the very weekend I would be in his area of England. I thought there was no way he would choose to tattoo me among the many people who (I assumed) would be sending in requests, but, again, with luck on my side, I was able to book an appointment.

My spouse had originally planned to simply drop me off at Albrighton's private studio and go to the nearest pub, while I sat for my five-to-six hour (what turned into a seven-and-a-half-hour) session. He changed his mind after Albrighton's, or, at this point, I feel like I can say Freddie's, warm welcome with comfy chairs, stocked beverage refrigerator and large television. My spouse happily lounged and watched Netflix movies all day while I was repeatedly poked with needles (though he did run out for snacks when my tattoo ran longer than initially thought and the earlier coffee and muffin were no longer satiating me). Freddie also keeps glucose tablets on hand which, along with the snacks, refueled my body to get through the last two hours of the tattoo.

Freddie and I talked about a variety of topics throughout the day. I didn't want to go completely fan girl and bombard him with questions about being on television. Nonetheless, he did share some behind-the-scenes tidbits that piqued my interest, both prompted and unprompted. He shared that he felt like he was accurately portrayed on the show and, surprisingly, the most frustrating part of the entire filming process was shooting the finale. The final three contestants, who had already been awake since the wee hours of the morning for filming, were told fairly early on in the day who won but had to continue filming for hours.

While hearing the tea about the show was interesting, I found myself more interested in hearing about Freddie himself and the whole culture of working in the tattooing industry.

Freddie got his first tattoo at age 18 and has worked in shops in New Zealand and England, first as a body piercer before transitioning to tattooing. He recently married his partner of five years, has an awesome dog whose image he has tattooed on his arm and a cat who is simply mean (Freddie used another word that I can't say in a work environment). He also makes his own brand of perfumes.

Freddie was incredibly personable, nice and really intuitive. I was very nervous because while I have 17 other tattoos, this was by far the longest I sat for a tattoo in one session. He seemed to know when I was into chatting with him and when I needed some quiet minutes in the more painful areas of tattooing. We swapped stories about traveling, living in different places as well as favorite movies, board games, television shows and music. (He's into super niche indie stuff while I tend to like more of the popular releases).

At the end of the session, we needed a few more minutes for the tattoo to air dry before wrapping it with Second Skin and Freddie used that time to answer my spouse's questions about perfume making and had us smell both pleasant and less-than-pleasant scents that make up some popular perfumes. He even gifted my spouse a bottle of perfume. We ended the day with Freddie shooting a couple of pictures and videos for his Instagram, then wrapping the tattoo and providing detailed instructions for aftercare.

While I have been getting inked since 2010, using the Second Skin as a healing tool is a completely new process for me and Freddie has been nothing but sweet about answering all of my questions, even when I seem to have a new question for him every day. He only asks that I send a picture when the tattoo has completely healed.

I know they say to never meet your heroes, but I can honestly say that advice doesn't apply here. This was originally just going to be a "one-off" tattoo for me; however, the experience already has me planning on returning in early 2025 for him to finish the rest of my arm and to catch up with him on whether we've watched any of the shows and movies we recommended to one another.

Check out Freddie's work on his Instagram page at [instagram.com/freddiealbrighton](https://www.instagram.com/freddiealbrighton) and keep your eyes peeled for his announcement about opening his diary for both England and America. ■

“Albrighton’s blend of reality, graffiti artistry, surrealism and creativity simply blew me away. I began following him on Instagram and through what can be called simply luck and fate, he opened his diary (tattoo appointment calendar) for the very weekend I would be in his area of England. ”



PHIL ESKRIDGE

There are many ways to express oneself. Tattoos are one; music is another. Phillip Eskridge uses both.

"I brought my Japanese Les Paul to the photoshoot because I love playing guitar. I've been playing for 25 years and it's one of the few ways I can express myself."

"All of my tattoos have a story and it's always the same story: I walked into a tattoo shop, closed my eyes and pointed at the wall. And that's how I've decided which tattoo to get that day. No, but seriously, my first ever tattoo was done at a friend's house when I was 15. Another friend made a tattoo machine on his own and I was the only one dumb enough to let him try it. The tattoo is the album cover for the 80's ska-punk band Operation Ivy. My favorite tattoo is my skeleton peeking out of a closet. It represents the saying 'skeletons in the closet,' something I think we can all relate to. My Texas tattoo has special significance. It's not my favorite tattoo but I am from Texas and it has become somewhat of a beacon to other misplaced Texans."





JESSICA CRINITE

Sometimes it isn't about the tattoo itself, but the experience behind getting the tattoo and the stories that can be told. Jessica Crinite never walks into a studio with a picture in hand. For her, "tattoos have two layers: what they stand for and the image themselves. I find an artist who has a style I like and during the consultation I explain what I want the tattoo to mean/symbolize, but that I want their own interpretation of that. The tattoos may be my story, but they are [also] a

collection of art from every artist I've worked with. I get a tattoo from every place we live as well. This way I have the best work from each artist, and unique designs to explain my story. My tattoos show my background in science, my experiences with ADHD and Autism, my family, my belief that we return to where we came from, that all people are united, my struggles with depression and my passion to learn something new every day."



ERICA SWEET

For Erica Sweet, tattoos have “enabled me to express myself through art that words can’t. Each tattoo has a story, whether it be a story of spontaneously deciding to get a tattoo as you walk past a shop or something with a deeper meaning that only you understand. The sunflower I got from my favorite song by Bad Bunny, “Ojitos Lindos.” Although it’s a song about loving a

significant other, to me it’s a song as a reminder to [love] myself as much as I would love someone else. The avocado is a matching tattoo with my daughter’s dad. He has one half and I the other to signify that we both came together to create a whole ‘avocado’ (our daughter).”



BRYAN GASTELUM

"Most of my tattoos were done in the moment but some were methodically planned out. Some I even share with my wife and my closest friends. Seeing each tattoo reminds me of who I am, what I love, and who I love." Gastelum has a large Tree of Life tattoo that "has deep meaning. It shows the progressions on how nature is lost to industrialization and pollution. The back transitions from a beautiful valley lush with life to the front on my shoulder where there is a wasteland of factories, and the tree is burning. The red web symbolizes the web of life and how we all share this life."



TAMALA MALERK

What possesses someone to tattoo a woman she has never met, and will never meet because she has been dead for about 500 years on their arm? In short, a love of reality television and women's history. Tamala Malerk had the rare opportunity to get tattooed by Freddie Albrighton, who made it all the way to the season finale of the popular tattoo reality show, "Ink Master."

"I happened to be visiting the area when Albrighton, based in England, had an opening in his schedule. When he heard I was visiting the castle of my favorite English queen, Katherine Parr, he knew that would make for a great tattoo subject, and I was completely on board."



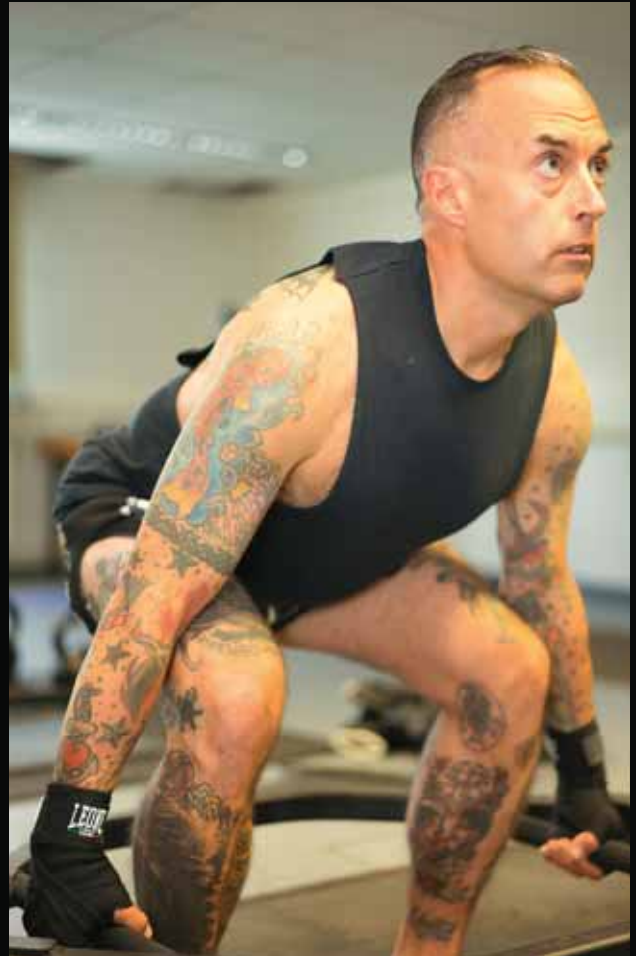


BENJAMIN BARRETT (BENNY B.)

For Benjamin Barrett, his tattoos tell his stories. From what bands he loves to commemorations of family members, symbols of heartbreak and proof he really likes his friends and wants to share their art. He has a little bit of everything.

"Some [tattoos] have stories connected to major events in my life such as the death of my father and the birth of my kids who are the most important part of my life. The ghost is my latest and it's a way to cope with the end of a long relationship and the first time I've ever felt total heartbreak and regret. It just stopped; so much was left unsaid, and the thought that it could be the last time we would ever talk still hurts."

"Some are connected to hardcore bands that I grew up listening to like Minor Threat as well as more modern bands like Incendiary and Expire. I had a name covered after divorce. But she is still a huge part of my life, and we created two amazing children together who see us still working together as a team in their lives. Many are simply works of art that friends designed, and I wanted to support them and their passion."





BRIAN WAITS

Family and faith are common reasons for getting tattooed. These are some of the reasons that Waits chose to get inked. "All my tattoos have a meaning. They remind me of people, and I get to tell others about them when I get asked about the tattoos."

"The [tattoos] impact my life by reminding me of those who hold a special place in my life. I got my sleeve in memory of my mom. She passed away from cancer in November 2023. She loved horses, roses and Jesus. One of our last photos of her was petting her horse. So I have a hand reaching for a horse. The hummingbird and windmill represent the paintings she did for my wife and me as a Christmas present, one of the last things she painted. The sacred heart represents her love for Christ and what he stood for. The broken clock is set to her time of death. It is a special piece that Noel Mendoza started from The Brand Tattoo in Lubbock, TX (horse, hand, clock, heart). The hummingbird,



windmill and rays around the heart were done by Baumholder artist Abraham Guerrero (Unknown Artist Tattoo Collective)."

His sleeve also acts as a cover-up tattoo and is a reminder to Waits (and the rest of us) of the kinds of decisions we make in our younger days. His sleeve "covers an old tattoo that I got from a friend. A part of it still remains as the crown of thorns around the sacred heart. I covered it up because the colors were fading, and I just wanted something better. It was my friend's third tattoo; so it wasn't the greatest. It sounded good at the time, just like most rash decisions made in your early 20's."





JESSE BOND

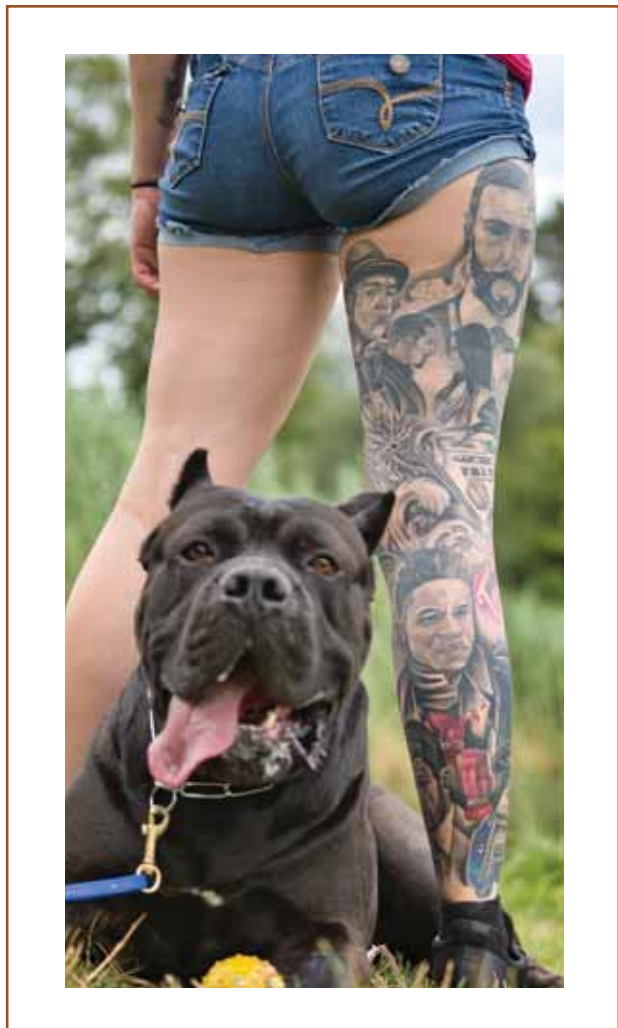
Pop culture can be a great inspiration for tattoos. Whether it be favorite movies, television shows or books, these things can illicit nostalgic memories and connections that warrant permanently inking the reminders on your body. Jesse Bond drew inspiration from "The Secret of Nihm" and "Ghost of Tsushima" for his gorgeous body art. He finds "Japanese and samurai culture honorable and interesting. Funny enough, the idea for my sleeve stemmed from a video game called 'Ghost of Tsushima' that my son and I played. The game followed Jin Sakai, a samurai on a quest to protect the island of Tsushima during the first Mongol invasion of Japan, based on true events. The game had such beautiful graphics and cinematography, while at the same time telling a great story. My sleeve incorporates a Kitsune (shapeshifting trickster "fox-spirit"), a samurai on horseback, the Torii gates of the Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, Yasaka Pagoda in Kyoto and Mt. Fuji. I find it commendable that honor is a value in Japanese culture. At the same time, I know humans are flawed and very complicated. To adhere to such honor, while trying to balance one's own self-interest is a double-edged sword, pun intended."





STEPHANIE DIXON

Animals are not just pets; they are members of the family. Stephanie Dixon proved that by getting tattoos of her beloved dog, a Cane Corso, Venom and her Sphynx cat, Kinora who "are very special to me and mean the world to me!" She's also chosen to commemorate her love of a 50 Cent-produced show; "My favorite tattoo is my Power Theme tattoo; it's my favorite show 50 Cent produced. [I have] never seen anyone with [the tattoo] and I still, to this day, watch [the show]!" Her tattoos are also a great conversation piece: "I get stopped a lot to make conversation. Most people tend to mind their business; [but the tattoos are] like an ice breaker for people to talk to me. We compare stories and artists."





ROBERT CHASON

"Each one of my tattoos has a story and a meaning behind them. The warrior is a reminder of strength, devotion, and aptitude. With that being said, a warrior isn't simply [a warrior] because he puts on armor. Rather, [he is a warrior because] he tests and trains himself daily, both mentally and physically, to become one, and as a self-reminder that there is always a reason to keep getting up after each fight (you can see as he is in the kneeling position of someone 'getting back up')."





ALEJANDRO ROSA

The more tattoos you have, the more stories you can tell.

Alejandro Rosa uses the symbolism in colors to share a piece of himself. "My tattoo of a magnolia flower is in red. It is the only flower that has red in my tattoos. The red represents perseverance, dignity and nobility, traits that characterize me."

He also has tattoos for his native land and family: "The sunflower that I have tattooed on the back of my forearm has the island of Puerto Rico which is my homeland. This means the flourishing of my country. I have a caricature tattooed on my right arm that symbolizes my grandfather. He passed away at a difficult time for my family. My twin brother and I have the same tattoo. I have a bird cage on the back of my left arm that covers one of my first tattoos. It was a piece of a song dedicated to my dad. I wrote it in a very small font and over time the ink expanded, and it could no longer be read."



RILEY MCCORMICK

Military service and tattoos go hand-in-hand. American military tattoos date back to when Naval service members were first exposed to Polynesian tattooing in the 1700s. Riley McCormick's Jolly Roger tattoo commemorates his service. He recalls, "I got my Jolly Roger tattoo when serving with Trial Defense Services (TDS). My trial partner and I agreed to get the tattoo, which is the logo for TDS, after we got a not guilty verdict for our client."



“

My tattoo above my right elbow is the Crest of the Grand Duchy of Baden...



GABRIEL (GONZO) GONZALES

Tattoos are great conversation pieces and service member Gabriel Gonzales gets to use them all the time at work to connect with others.

“Tattoos have always had a positive impact on my life. Most of what I do for work is engaging with service members and getting to know them on a personal level. Tattoos help me to start up conversations. Or, people will just ask me about them. My tattoo above my right elbow is the Crest of the Grand Duchy of Baden, which is the region of Germany where my spouse and their family is from. It has oak leaves for my graduation of German Hunting School and an Edelweiss to remember our trips to the Swiss Alps.”





KELLY SHEA

Kelly Shea works in the Air Force as a Military Working Dog Handler and her tattoos symbolize both her service and her family.

"My favorite tattoo would be a tie between two pieces. The first one is my chest piece. I got it after my first deployment; I had thought about it all seven months I was deployed and got it the second I returned and have loved it ever since. My second favorite is my realism tattoo on my thigh; an artist came in from Greece in a guest artist position at a studio in Germany I went to. I wanted a half girl/half dog face (because of my job). The artist used my features, like my curly hair, to make it look more like me and was actually able to use the outline of my dog's head to make the dog skull represent her. I absolutely love the detail he put in. It's so special to me as I am no longer working with that dog due to PCSing and now I always have her with me in a way."

"I have three very significant tattoos. All are for my family. The first is one of my very first tattoos: It is my mom's signature on my wrist from one of the letters she wrote to me during BMT. Second, I got an American traditional tattoo that says 'Dad' in it. I got it at the Frankfurt 'Gods of Ink' tattoo convention on my dad's birthday when he came to visit me! Last, I got to visit and meet my niece for the first time last December at her 2nd birthday party. She LOVES dinosaurs, so I got a dinosaur skull on my shoulder with her name written around."



BRETT BAILEY

"Tattoos are just a part of life, they tell stories, they convey meaning, and they are reminders that art can be powerful."

Bailey's tattoos are a reflection of this statement. He has tattoos that are reminiscent of his family and his faith. His tattoo of Jacob the angel, "represents the futile struggle to fight against God. When Jacob lost against heaven he then became Israel." His mother is represented by the June flowers, a honeysuckle and a rose. His tattoos also reflect some less-than-great decisions: "Sometimes you just get crappy tattoos and make bad decisions, finding the right artist to cover them up only adds to the art itself."





LUIS COLÓN CARTAGENA

Family is very important to Luis Colón Cartagena and that is represented in his life and tattoos. Colón Cartagena chose to bring some baseball-related items to his photo session and these items are “very meaningful for me, because [baseball] has always been my dad’s favorite sport. It also was the first sport I learned how to play, with my dad, obviously. It is one of my favorite sports and reminds me of when I was a kid.”

He chooses to honor other family members and his faith through his two favorite tattoos: “I have a tattoo that I call ‘Eva’ which I took from the Bible. It is inspired by my wife. It took me to the Bible where the verse refers not to affect or harm your body because you and your wife are two in one, one flesh. It talks about the significance of my wife and how much I love to take care of her, but [also] the way God wants us to take care of each other. The other [favorite tattoo] is in my right arm sleeve where it shows family members whom God called and aren’t with us anymore. I called them my warriors: a miscarriage, two nephews, my grandfather and my grandmother.”



READER SUBMISSIONS

TATTOO SELF

We asked and you answered. Here are self-submissions from our European-based readers.

ANASTASIA TOMRACHEVA

"My flower bouquet was done in two separate pieces. The very first one goes up to my waistline and represents every person in my family depending on their birth month flower. The center two peonies are me and my husband who are surrounded by our big family and kids. Lilac was added later on since it's my mom's favorite flower. The bottom flower bouquet has my best friend's birth month flowers.

"[The] girl with a suitcase and balloons going along the road towards Siberian mountains represents me - immigrant born in Siberia, a military spouse for 15 years who is living, constantly moving (Germany is our sixth duty station), true hodophile (addicted to traveling). The balloons show my personality - funky, goofy and optimistic through to my bones."



KIMBER RACHUY

"Before any tattoo policies were changed when I was still in [the Air Force] I had a lot of problems on the flight line with my sleeve. My favorite style is American Traditional/Old School."

KASSIE DIGNAN

"My back piece is the most special piece I have. It's a semblance that my mom isn't here but she will always have my back. I may not see her, but she will always be there."

ES

KATIE WELLS

"As someone who regularly practices yoga and finds spirituality in nature, I'd always wanted a lotus. I also resonated deeply with the symbolism of resilience and the duality of being able to hold space for the positives in life, despite the abject."



CHRISTINA WALL

"My husband and I had a miscarriage in July 2022 while we were stationed in Okinawa, Japan. When we found out I was pregnant, I was in the States and my husband was in Japan. We then shared nine days of pregnancy bliss together in the States. Then, he stayed for training, and I went back home to Okinawa. The miscarriage happened just a few days after I arrived back on the island. I struggled with it for a very long time. I felt like a piece of me was forever missing. My husband was definitely my rock, and he kept me going through the ups and downs and all the in between."

In May 2023, a friend had a tattoo covered up by an artist visiting Okinawa from mainland Japan and I decided to go get something to memorialize our baby we lost. I messaged the artist and within three hours I was finished and had a beautiful forearm tattoo! I wanted something that didn't scream 'we had a miscarriage!!' but something that I could share my story if I felt led to do so.

More often than not, I have opened up about the baby we lost, and it had truly helped me heal. In December 2023, just a few days before PCSing to Ramstein, I went to another artist who just so happens to own the tattoo shop the previous artist was visiting from on mainland Japan, and he completed my forearm tattoo with more flowers."

ANDREW GUEVARA

"All my tattoos have either a special meaning or story behind them. My favorite one is my most recent one the Cat. My cat actually just passed away last month and I got the tattoo to represent him over a year ago. I let the artist have full range of creativity as long as he used my cat's sitting stance as the basis. Since his passing, I've been able to cherish this tattoo more than ever since he is no longer here with us."

CORTNEY LAMAR

"While I have many tattoos that mean something to me, this tattoo is extra special. It symbolizes my love of reading and how books can take you places. Not only is reading a huge part of my life, but I am also an author."

TATTOO SELFIES CONTINUED

READER SUBMISSIONS



CYNTHIA GILMAN

"I have been lucky in having only positive responses to my tattoos, or maybe I'm good at turning a blind eye to negative people."

RENEE HERRERA

"My mom never let me draw on myself growing up or stick on temp tattoos and now I have almost two full sleeves!"



ANDREW LY

"Tattoos have always been a special part of my life, they represent my life story, the various assignments in my military career, my family and heritage across my body. I am currently working on an entire body suit. A big portion of my body suit is burning monk, which represents me changing into a better person. Each portion represents a different chapter of me."

CAMILLE ISAACSON

"My husband and I eloped and didn't tell anyone (not even family). I decided to tattoo our anniversary somewhere only we would see."

JOANESS RICCI

"When I got my first tattoo it felt liberating. I felt like I could do anything with my body art because it's my personal space to do as I please."



KATLYN HAMILTON

"My second largest piece was a nine and a half hour session at a convention."



ANGEL COTTO



NOEL MIN

"I had a the face of the Virgin Mary from Michelangelo's Pieta [and] covered it with a gypsy woman looking to the sky, mainly because it was a terrible tattoo."



CHRISTINA MOORE

"[It] reminds me to keep going despite my disease."

TATTOO CONVENTION DIRECTORY

Germany

Kronacher Tattoo Convention | Oct. 26-27, 2024 | Schützenhaus Kronach

Schwabach Tattoo Convention | Oct. 26-27, 2024 | Markgrafensaal

Tattoo Convention Brandenburg | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Stahlpalast Brandenburg

Hagen Tattoo Convention | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Stadthalle Hagen

Wassertrüdingen Tattoo Piercing Convention | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Hesselberghalle

Höxter Tattoo Convention | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Residenz Stadthalle Höxter

Braunschweig Tattoo Weekend | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Braunschweig

Tattoo Convention Brandenburg an der Havel | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Stahlpalast

Tattoo Fair Wassertrüdingen | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Hesselberghalle Wassertrüdingen

Tattoo Convention Ludwigsburg | Nov. 9-10, 2024 | Reithaus Ludwigsburg

Tattoo Convention Kiel | Nov. 9-10, 2024 | Ostseekai Kiel

Elite Tattoo Convention | Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2024 | Landschaftspark Duisburg

Tattoo Convention Deggendorf | Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2024 | Stadthallen Deggendorf

Tattoo Convention Datteln | Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2024 | Stadthalle Datteln

Moosburg Tattoo Convention | Dec. 6-8, 2024 | Stadthall Moosburg

Magdeburg Tattoo Convention | Dec. 7-8, 2024 | Messe Magdeburg

Tattoo Convention Baumholder XMAS Edition | Dec. 7-8, 2024 | Bruehall Baumholder

TattooTattaa XMAS Special Retro 80s Convention | Dec. 21-22, 2024 | Bonn-Meckenheim Jungholzhalle

Tattoo Messe Erlangen | Jan. 11-12, 2025 | Redouten Hall

Tattoo Convention Grossmehring | Jan. 11-12, 2025 | Nibelungenhallek

Braunschweig Tattoo Convention | Jan. 11-12, 2025 | MEC Millenium Event Center

Tattoo Expo Zwickau: Jan 17-19, 2025 | Neue Welt

Tattoo Convention Fürth | Jan. 18-19, 2025 | Stadthalle Fürth

Tattoo Convention Passau | Jan. 25-26, 2025 | X-Point-Halle

Papenburger Tattoo Weekend | Feb. 1-2, 2025 | Hotel Hiling, Papenburg

Tattoo Convention Husum | Feb. 1-2, 2025 | Messe Husum

Tattoo Convention Hameln | Feb. 2-3, 2025 | Rattenfaengerhalle

Tattoo Convention Goeppingen | Feb. 8-9, 2025 | EWS Arena

Tattoo Convention Limburg | Feb. 15-16, 2025 | Stadthalle Limburg

Tattoo Convention Lippstadt | March 1-2, 2025 | Südl Schützenhalle, Lippstadt

Cuxhavener Tattoo Weekend | March 8-9, 2025 | Kugelbake-Halle

Neumünster Tattoo Convention | March 8-9, 2025 | Stadthalle Neumünster

Cham Tattoo Convention | March 14-15, 2025 | Stadthalle Cham

Tattoo Convention Waltrop | March 15-16, 2025 | Stadthalle Waltrop

Tattoo & Lifestyle Leipzig | March 15-16, 2025 | Agra Messepark

Gods of Ink Tattoo Convention | March 28-30, 2025 | Messe Frankfurt – Forum

Tattoo Convention Moers | March 29-30, 2025 | ENNI Eis- und Eventhalle

Aurich Tattoo Weekend | March 29-30, 2025 | Mayor-Anklam-Platz, Aurich

Black Forest Tattoo Weekend "Original" | April 5-6, 2025 | Kurhaus Titisee

Tattoo Convention Worms | April 5-6, 2025 | Die Kapelle Worms

Ulm Tattoo Convention | April 5-6, 2025 | Ulm Messe

Tattoo Convention Giessen | April 26-27, 2025 | Messe Giessen

Dortmund Tattoo Convention | May 9-11, 2025 | Westfalenhallen Dortmund

International Tattoo Con | May 9-11, 2025 | Messe Dortmund (Westfalenhallen)

Tattoo Convention Bamberg | May 15-17, 2025 | Hauptsmoorhalle Strullendorf

Lüdenscheid Tattoo Convention | May 24-25, 2025 | Historische Schützenhalle

Tattoo Weekend Dinslaken | June 7-8, 2025 | Platz D'Agen 4

Tattoo & Art Show Offenburg | June 28-29, 2025 | Messe Offenburg

Tattoo and Art Show | June 28-29, 2025 | EDEKA Arena, Offenburg

Bremerhaven Tattoo Weekend | Oct. 11-12, 2025 | Apollo Bremerhaven

Coburg Tattoo Convention | July 26-27, 2025 | Alte Pakethalle

Smaller tattoo conventions may pop-up throughout the year, scan the QR to read our most recent "What's Up This Weekend" in the KMC, Wiesbaden, Stuttgart and Bavaria to find more cons and things to do near you.



Italy

Passion Art Tattoo Convention | Oct. 25-27, 2024 | Bolzano

East Coast Tattoo Convention | Oct. 25-27, 2024 | Pescara Fiere

Ancona Tattoo Expo | Nov. 8-10, 2024 | Ancona

Catania Tattoo Convention | Nov. 9-10, 2024 | Catania

Milano Tattoo Convention | Jan. 31, 2024-Feb. 2, 2025 | Superstudio Maxi

Passion Art Tattoo Convention Verona | March 7-9, 2025 | Eatly Verona

Vicenza Tattoo Convention | March 14-16, 2025 | Vicenza

Marche Tattoo Convention | Apr. 11-13, 2025 | Colli del Tronto

Caserta Tattoo Convention | Apr. 11-13, 2025 | Caserta

Lucca Tattoo Expo | Apr. 11-13, 2025 | Sorbano del Giudice Lucca

La Vallee Tattoo Fest | Apr. 12-13, 2025 | Saint-Vincent

Bologna Tattoo Show | Apr. 25-27, 2025 | Bologna

Verona International Tattoo Expo | May 3-5, 2025 | Verona

Tatuami Tattoo Convention | May 10-11, 2025 | San Donato Milanese

Napoli Tattoo Art International | Sept. 27-29, 2025 | Napoli

Trieste International Tattoo Expo | Nov. 15-16, 2025 | Porto Vecchio

Florence Tattoo Convention | TBD | Florence

Poland

Kustomhead 2025 | Feb. 8, 2025 | Wrocław, Poland

Krakow Tattoo Fest | June 7-8, 2025 | Kraków, Poland

Warsaw Tattoo Convention | TBD | Warsaw, Poland

U.K. and Ireland

Winter Tattoo Bash | Dec. 7-8, 2024 | Coventry U.K.

Galway Tattoo Show | Jan. 25-26, 2025 | Galway, Ireland

Tattoo Freeze | Feb. 1-2, 2025 | Telford, U.K.

Brighton Tattoo Convention | Feb. 22-23, 2025 | Brighton, U.K.

UK Tattoo Fest | March 15-16, 2025 | Milton Keynes

North Lakes Tattoo Show | March 28-30, 2025 | Carlisle

Maidstone Tattoo Extravaganza | April 19-21, 2025 | Detling

Portsmouth Tattoo Fest | April 5-6, 2025 | Portsmouth

Big North Tattoo Show | May 10-11, 2025 | Newcastle upon Tyne

France

Cahors Tattoo Geek | Oct. 25-27, 2024 | Fontanes

Love Tattoo Festival | Oct. 12-13, 2024 | La Teste-de-Buch

Potopistons Tattoo Convention | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Espace Tartalin, Aiffres

Sugar Ink Tattoo Convention | Nov. 8-10, 2024 | Coulommiers

Cloyes Tattoo Expo | Nov. 9-10, 2024 | Cloyes-sur-le-Loir

Drome Tattoo Convention | Nov. 9-10, 2024 | Montélimar

Salon Du Tatouage Clermont | Nov. 16-17, 2024 | Grande Halle d'Auvergne

Troyes Tattoo Convention | Nov. 23-24, 2024 | Troyes

Tarn Tattoo Convention | Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2024 | Le Sequestre

Nohell Tattoo Show | Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2024 | Ozoir-la-Ferrière

Merry Christmas Tattoo Show | Dec. 7-8, 2024 | Bar-le-Duc

Planetarium Tattoo | Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2025 | Paris

Toulouse Tattoo Salon | Jan. 2025 TBD | Labège

Vichy Tattoo Convention | Mar. 22-23, 2025 | Bellerive-sur-Allier

Decaz Tattoo Show | Feb. 7-9, 2025 | Decazeville

Lille Tattoo Convention | Feb. 7-9, 2025 | Lille Grand Palais

Saint-Quentin Tattoo Event | Feb. 8-9, 2025 | Palais de Fervaques

Lyon Tattoo Convention | Feb. 15-16, 2025 | Villeurbanne

Dammarie Les Lys Tattoo and Vintage Convention | Feb. 22-23, 2025 | Dammarie-les-Lys

Orléans Tattoo Show | Feb. 28- March 2, 2025 | Orléans

Carcassonne Tattoo Convention | March 7-9, 2025 | Carcassonne

Auxerre Tattoo Convention | March 8-9, 2025 | Auxerre

Amiens Tattoo Show | March 22-23, 2025 | Amiens

Marseille Tattoo Salon | March 22-23, 2025 | Marseille

Besançon Tattoo Show | April 5-6, 2025 | Besançon

Viry Tattoo Convention | April 11-13, 2025 | Viry-Châtillon

Rouen Tattoo Festival | April 18-20, 2025 | Le Grand-Quevilly

Bo Way Ink Tattoo Convention | June 14-15, 2025 | Beauvais

Axone Tattoo Show | Oct. 11-12, 2025 | Montbéliard

Cantal Tattoo Show | Nov. 22-24, 2024 | Aurillac

Marmande Tattoo Show | March 8-9, 2025 | Marmande

Rest of Europe

Nordic Ink Festival | Oct. 24-26, 2024 | Frederikshavn, Denmark

Alicante Tattoo Convention | Oct. 25-27, 2024 | Alicante, Spain

Wildstyle & Tattoo Messe Salzburg | Oct. 26-27, 2024 | Salzburg, Austria

Bulgaria Tattoo Expo | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Sofia, Bulgaria

Kempen Tattoo Convention | Nov. 2-3, 2024 | Herselt, Belgium

Brussels Tattoo Convention | Nov. 8-10, 2024 | Brussels, Belgium

Pardubice Tattoo Event | Nov. 16, 2024 | Pardubice, Czech Republic

Wallonia Tattoo Festival | Jan. 24-26, 2025 | Wavre, Belgium

East Flanders Tattoo Convention | Feb. 1-2, 2025 | Berlare, Belgium

Rock City – Eindhoven Tattoo Convention | Feb. 8-9, 2025 | Dynamo, Eindhoven, Netherlands

Rotterdam Tattoo Convention | March 8-9, 2025 | Rotterdam, Netherlands

Iași Tattoo Fest | March 14-16, 2025 | Iași, Romania

Groove Ink Tattoo Convention | March 8-9, 2025 | Colfontaine, Belgium

Maastricht Tattoo Expo | March 29-30, 2025 | Maastricht, Netherlands

Cyprus Tattoo Convention | March 28-30, 2025 | Limassol, Cyprus

Numaga Tattoo Convention | April 4-6, 2025 | Nijmegen, Netherlands

Helsinki Ink | April 4-6, 2025 | Helsinki, Finland

Antwerp Tattoo Convention | April 26-27, 2025 | Antwerpen, Belgium

Ink n Tattoo Festival de la Famenne | May 3-5, 2025 | WEX (Wex Marche En Famenne), Belgium

Wild Tattoo Show | June 6-9, 2025 | Namur, Belgium

Sewer Tattoo Fest | June 21, 2025 | Žilina, Slovakia

Malta Tattoo Show | July 25-27, 2025 | Malta ■

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