

If you follow the world tattoo scene at all by browsing through the numerous websites dedicated to this subject, you will notice that every country in the world has lots of experts. Even so, there are some who stand out from the rest. The Serbian tattooist known as Damir Seen is one of those who stand out. What is fascinating about him is the ease with which he crosses artistic boundaries without becoming attached to a particular style or technique. Tattoos of almost all styles and well known techniques can be discovered in his design portfolio, yet they can always be differentiated in some way. At 26, Damir Seen is still young and has been professionally involved in tattooing since 2001. For an artist who has been involved in tattooing for barely 5 years he has achieved unbelievable success and has inspired among many young artists the confidence that with work and effort they can make their dreams come true in a very short space of time. He never had a teacher or anyone to help him overcome problems inherent in this kind of work, which is possibly one of the reasons why his work is so different to that of other artists. At the same time as working everyday in his Belgrade studio, he created the first national Serbian tattoo magazine in 2003, in which tattoo images by Serbian artists are published.

The magazine administered the success of the whole Serbian tattoo scene, whilst he, as the chief editor, is trying to increase the degree of professionalism in the whole tattoo scene by means of specialist texts. This August saw the publication of his first book by the title of "Profesionalno Tetoviranje"¹, about which his colleagues say that it is the basic educational material for all tattooists and that all tattoo experts should put it to the top of their pile of books. He has participated in a couple of international competitions but only as an honorary jury member, and claims that he has a lot more to learn before he actively competes. He possesses a special passion for his work and believes that with each tattoo he creates a special moment in the history of modern tattooing. For him a tattoo is the most sensational form of current artistic expression and he is exceptionally happy to be partaking in it.

How did it all start?

In my case it all starts from a talent for drawing. From a young age I would draw in my spare time and very quickly got used to expressing my feelings and needs through drawing. I saw a way of communicating with the world through drawing. A picture is worth a thousand words, and not just in one language. Sometimes more can be said with a picture than with words. Due to many requests by friends my drawings started to move from paper to skin.

Do you think that a talent for drawing is the foundation of a good tattooist?

I wouldn't bet on that if it was my skin in question! I think that tattooing is more of a technical job. Only after technique is it about expressing art and a talent for drawing. Only a combination of these two allows for success, never one or the other. In order to reach the expression of drawing abilities you have to first master the technical part of the job, which is in fact the hardest part of professional tattooing.

¹ Professional Tattooing

You've been involved in tattooing for a relatively short period of time in respect to the work you've done?

Thank you, I'll take that as a compliment. I think time is a very important factor, but not the most important. "Mileage", and of course the amount of devotion invested in your work are more important. Working for the money and working out of passion is not the same thing. Money is a very important factor in every job, but if you do something purely because of the money the quality of the work quickly deteriorates. However if there is a passion for the job there is impending success. Obviously along with passion you need a lot of effort, work, persistence and experimentation. I think that my success in relation to the number of years work is the main reason why many people who are involved in tattooing and who study it are interested in me and my work. I'm aware that I've achieved great success in a short time, but I think that my time is yet to come. I still don't consider myself one hundred percent artist. I've got a lot more to learn.

Do you come across problems in your work and how do you overcome them?

There are always problems but you have to look at them as a challenge. If you want to find a solution you have to go all out. I mean, as soon as I'm faced with a problem or something isn't going right, I focus on only that until I succeed. Persistence always pays off if there's something you really want to achieve.

How would you describe your artistic style and direction in tattooing?

I don't think that I've established my tattooing style yet. My work and tattooing style at the moment emulate mainly the technical creation of tattoos. A personal tattooing style is incredibly hard to impose especially if you work in an environment where a tattoo is still a fashion trend not an art. The society and area where I live are reflected in my work, that's mainly my clients' ideas to which I try to add my own stamp to make them recognizable and at least a little different from previous ones.

What in your opinion is a tattoo and could you give your definition of this kind of art form?

For me a tattoo is a measure of personal freedom, nevertheless you have to bear in mind that on the way to freedom you need courage. Tattooing is indeed an art form but not every tattoo is art.

Now a bit about some technical aspects. Everyone talks about quality tattoos.

What do you believe is crucial as far as quality is concerned?

When we talk about the quality of a tattoo we think about a strong intensity of colours, clean lines without lumps or breaks, smooth coloured surfaces without gaps, refined shadows with nice shading and properly drawn designs without mistakes or damaged skin with scars or creases. Here I'm not talking about the appearance of the motif because in that case we split them into nice and ugly, but let's say that an ugly motif done with quality is often nicer than a poorly done nice motif. In my opinion the most important factor for a quality tattoo is the

method of colour insertion under the skin! Everything depends on that. Two tattooists can do the same person, in the same place, with the same colour and still the quality can be totally different, you wouldn't believe it.

We know that you're the creator, owner and chief editor of the Serbian tattoo magazine. How did the idea come to you and how do you find time for both your studio and the magazine?

The need for some educational information was the biggest problem for me when I started to get involved in tattooing. In Serbia there were no books, magazines or similar sources of information for someone who wanted to get a tattoo and even less for someone who wanted to create one. I found it really hard to get the information I wanted. For that reason I created the magazine and I believe that as a result our, albeit still small, scene has visibly been revived. In a short space of time lots of young and quality artists appeared, more and more people started to get tattoos and the quality of services in our country increased. As far as time is concerned, it's hard for me to find time but as long as I have something to share with my readers I'll sacrifice my free time because I know that there are people who will appreciate it.

Have you got any unfulfilled ideas or a surprise in the near future?

I've got lots of ideas. They can't all fit in here but I'll single one out. Soon I plan to organize the first international tattoo exposition in Belgrade which would then be held every year. Naturally you're invited and you'll be notified about it in time. As well as ideas, I've got lots of desires, one of them being to visit a tattoo exposition out of Europe.

Where's your studio at the moment?

My studio is in Serbia's capital city, Belgrade. All the details can be found on this website: www.damirtattoo.com or you can contact me by email from my website.