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# INK EXPLOSION

## GERMANY

Whilst wandering about at the Manchester Tattoo show, I had heard a few rumours that there was to be a new show, taking place in Germany.



DAVE BY BOB TYRRELL © NIGHT GALLERY, USA

The rumour was that a very healthy selection of international artists were going to attend, many from America and beyond. I'd heard the likes of Bob Tyrrell, Liorcifer, Carlos Torres, Hannah Aitchison, Joe Cappobianco, Jime Litwalk, Nick Baxter, Tom Strom and many others were on the line up, so this started to sound like a good show to visit. After a phone call to the organiser – Andy Schmidt from Andy's Body Electric – the list was not only confirmed but was expanded upon. That sealed it; it was time to book my flight to Germany...

Soon it was time for the show, so I headed out to the airport where I met

one of the British contingent due to work the show - Ash from Ash's tattoos in Warrington and his good lady. Ash has been putting out some great portraiture and colour realism work of late, so I was keen to see just what he had lined up for the weekend.

Arriving in Düsseldorf, we were picked up by one of Andy's helpers who (quite literally) took off down the autobahn at breakneck speed to deliver us at the doors of the Kaiser Friedrich Hall, the venue for the weekend. After a coffee to steady my nerves from the safe but fast drive, it was time to see 'what's occurring' in the hall. The venue is a huge multi-



DIRK BY BUENA VISTA TATTOO, GERMANY

DIRK BY BUENA VISTA TATTOO, GERMANY

HANNAH BY ANDY ENGEL @ ANDY'S TATTOOS, GERMANY

MIKLOS BY CSABA BANYAI, GERMANY

floored building overlooking the small town of Munchengladbach – Famous for its football team so I am told. 'Munchen' is a pretty little town with spotlessly clean streets, a healthy selection of bars and restaurants, and lots of interesting sculptures dotted about the pedestrianised areas and parks. It was weird though, walking through these quaint streets and not seeing a single piece of litter, which was very nice but virtually every building had some form of graffiti sprawled on its walls. Some of it was pretty good but the majority was quite poor, but that didn't seem to spoil the town's charm at all. It just made it more colourful.

Back in the hall, things were at a frenetic pace as you would expect a few hours before the doors open at any show, especially an inaugural one.

Andy had decided to open the doors to the public on the Friday afternoon to give folk more time to get work done and no sooner had the doors opened, than tattoos were in the making. As time ticked on and the welcoming speeches were given, in both German and English (a nice touch that), the show got underway. Lots of the booths were already filled with clients beginning their inky weekend. The artists were spread over four rooms

on three floors, with the majority in the main hall on the first floor, where the main stage was also situated. Walking among the booths on the first floor was almost like going to a convention in the US. I walked



past Carlos Torres who was next to Bob Tyrrell who was close to Jo Capobianco and Jime Litwalk. Next to them was John

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Montgomery, and Hannah Aitchison and opposite these guys were Dan Henk, Paul Acker, on the other side

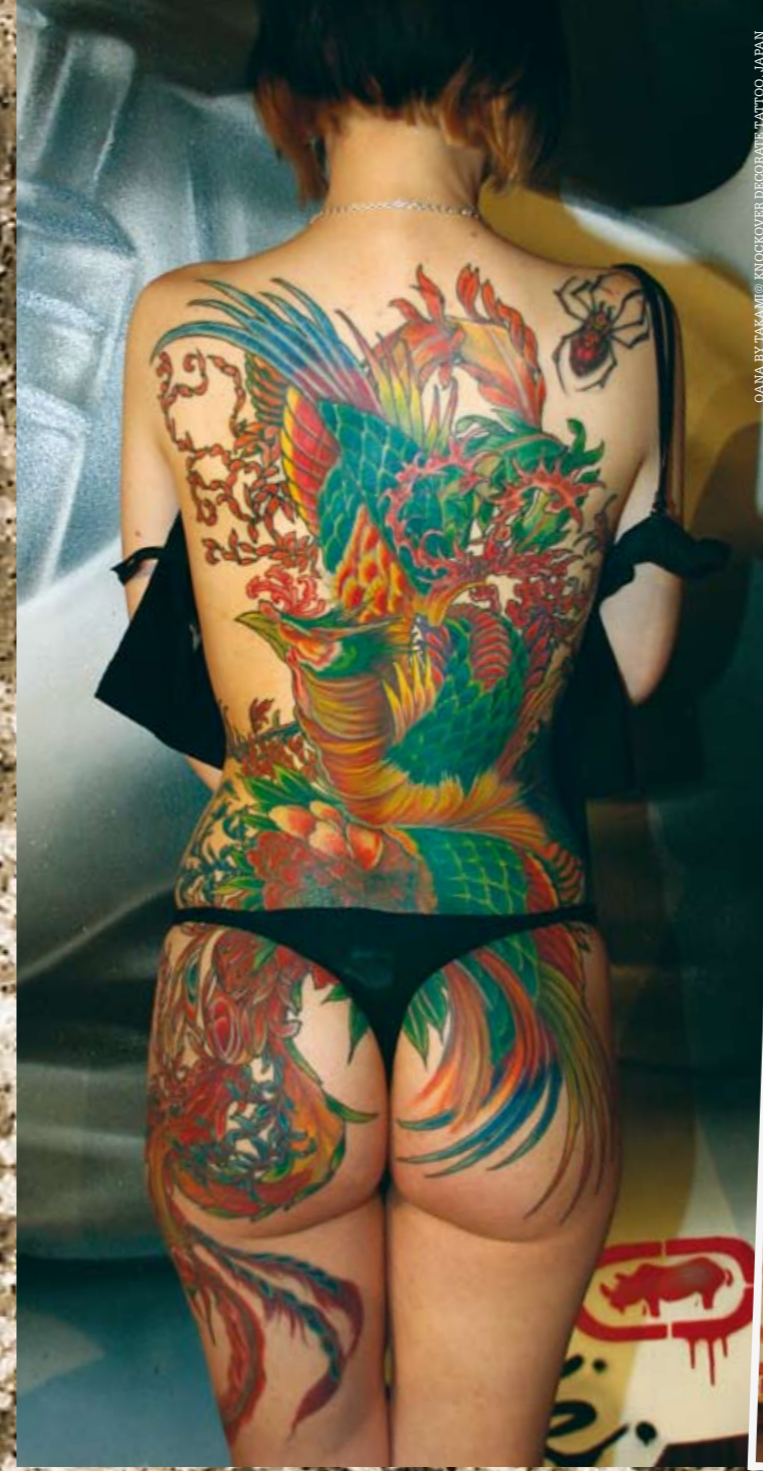
of the hall was Tony Ciavarro. Whilst the likes of Liorcifer, Ben Moss and Tom Strom were in a smaller room just off the main hall. Upstairs was Mike DeVries and Nick Baxter, the American contingent reminded



TATTOO BY DAN HENK, USA



TATTOO BY NICK BAXTER USA



OAMA BY TAKAMI @ KNOCKOVER DECORATE TATTOO JAPAN



NICO BY CHRIS @ MAGIC MOON GERMANY



TATTOO BY LEO @ NAKED TRUST TATTOO

me of what it must have been like back in the early fifties when musicians and singers all went on tour together in a succession of big old greyhound busses, only this time the 'Great American Tattoo Tour' had hit town via the airport.

Andy must have some influence to get such a healthy list of transatlantic artists over considering the difficulties many foreign tattooists are having these days with over zealous customs officials. Not forgetting his own countrymen, Andy had invited a sizeable amount of home grown talent in the shapes of Andy Engel, Tommy Lee Wendtner, Miss Nico from All Style Tattoo, Nine Lives Tattoos and many more; there were close to forty Artists working from Germany and many more from other countries including Holland,

Sweden, France Japan, Italy, Singapore and Russia, with the UK being represented by Bez and Ash.

Later, in the afternoon there was a pin striping exhibition with a scooter and a BMW motorbike getting the paint treatment. This drew a pretty big crowd, as did the many other trade stalls selling jewellery, clothing, magazines, books and gifts. The rooms started to fill up not long after half five. I assume that this was due

with many liking to wear the clothes and listen to the music; but in Germany, it is HUGE. Nine out of ten men walking around the venue either sported a quiff, huge turnups and/or a work shirt; the lady's wore the big multilayered dresses or again, jeans with turnups that you could hide a small child in, and fifties style hairdos. I felt like I had gone back in time a few decades. It was as though the sixties had never happened!

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to folk leaving work for the weekend. As the throng of tattoo machines continued, on stage was the, by now, regular art fusion, with three canvases and three artists all sharing the stage to create a collaborative piece of art.

Now I know in the UK there is quite a resurgence of the fifties/rockabilly music and style entering the convention scene

Along with the look was the music. This set the tone for the entire weekend. Rock N Roll and Rockabilly music accompanied the tattooists from the moment the doors opened until they shut late in the evening. I can put up with a bit of both styles of music but after three days I wanted to stick pencils in my ears; even some of the Americans I spoke to said they



TATTOO BY PETER @ MAGIC MOON, GERMANY



TATTOO BY PETER @ MAGIC MOON, GERMANY

loved Johnny Cash but they wouldn't be listening to him for a few months after they got home, such was the overload. This look is massive in Germany with lots of dedicated 50's shows and conventions taking place, there were stalls selling gentleman's pomade (a sort of hair grease), R'n'R memorabilia and all other varieties of 50's merchandise.

As Friday came to an end, several of the big name artists held seminars for those not working the show but wanting to further their careers and techniques. For the rest of us, it was time to head to the bars and restaurants to grab a drink and a meal and reflect on what was a great start to the weekend.

Saturday and the crowd was much bigger than the previous day, this had the effect of increasing the temperature inside and it was nice to head outside every now and then to get some fresh air as the sun

shone for what apparently was the first time in months. Although the heat was quite intense inside, many folk chose to keep their coats and jackets on. This made my job pretty hard trying to spot tattoos. Occasionally I would spy a colour tattoo poking out of a work shirt or some black and grey masterpiece tempting me from beneath a cardigan, worn back to front of course, (ala fifties style!).

I did fare much better when it came to the judging. Myself and one of the other photographers (thanks Mick!) from the German tattoo magazine; Tattoowier, cleared some space stage right and we herded the contestants over, after they had been judged, for photographic purposes.

This worked out perfectly and I must say it was really refreshing to see new work from other countries and I breathed a sigh of relief at actually getting some tattoo photos. ☺



KALBY LUCKY TATTOO, GERMANY

As well as the long list of international artists attending, there were many more local tattooists I had not previously heard of so it was good to see work from many of these guys 'up close and personal' so to speak. On the Saturday there was just two categories in the competitions, Black & Grey and Asian. This made the judging flow quite easily but the categories were open to interpretation as some B&G pieces had a small amount of colour in the tattoos and the Asian meant anything from Japanese to all other styles of colour work, but that was fine and the competition ran very smoothly and efficiently.

Walking about the venue, I started to

**Max 'From Hell' had some great work on show and was hard at work tattooing all weekend; such was the demand for his own style of Black and Grey work.**

see some great tattoos taking shape. Nick Baxter had just finished and superb worm type creature (The Labyrinth?) on a girl's shoulder, Thomas Kynst was working on a large, across the shoulder piece of black

and grey work. Bez was half way through a wonderful rendition of a colourful bullfinch set in a heart-shaped area, done in such a way that

the tattoo looked like it was under the girl's flesh. Dan Henk tattooed some wonderful portraits of a chap's pet ducks, done in only a way that Dan can, with blood and worms coming from the animals. Speaking to Dan after the tattoo he said, "It came out great, but there wasn't enough blood, there

should have been more blood!" Ah, true Dan Henk style!

A chap by the name of Randy from a studio called Heaven of Colours in Austria was producing some amazing colour tattoos. I had seen quite a few tattoos by him earlier whilst on stage during the judging and I was told that he and Boris from Hungary are good friends and you could definitely see the Boris influence in his work. Max 'From Hell' had some great work on show and was hard at work tattooing all weekend; such was the demand for his own style of Black and Grey work.

Talking of styles, there was one booth that had a big crowd around it all weekend. That was the booth of Simone And Volko from Buena Vista Tattoo. These guys have been taking the tattoo world by storm over the past year or so with their very distinctive portraits blended with strong graphical shapes and text, many of which are sat on unusual places on the body. Their work is amazing. It's so good to see a new style emerging in the tattooing industry. Simone and Volko will both be working their first UK show at Tattoo Jam ([www.tattoojam.co.uk](http://www.tattoojam.co.uk)) in August if you like the look of their work.

Later, we were entertained by some burlesque dancers, then a chap called Ski-King who took to the stage. Intrigued, I stood to see what this rather imposing chap was going to do and judging by the



TATTOO BY BEZ @ TRIPLE SIX STUDIOS, SUNDERLAND



TATTOO BY ELSON YEO @ THINK TATTOO, SINGAPORE



TATTOO BY SANTA SANGRE, COLOGNE

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cheers that went up when he appeared, he was already well known in Germany. The music started and off he went; into a stage act of yep, you guessed it. Fifties covers... This was my queue to hit the bar, but I have to say I hung around for a couple of numbers and his voice was pretty amazing as was his Johnny Cash tribute, which was very impressive. I did like his Elvis meets Motorhead rendition of Ace of Spades too.

That night, the artists were treated to a party laid on by Andy and his team. A large coach took all the attending artists to a barn, apparently in the middle of nowhere that was decked out with sand, surfboards, hoola girls and flower garlands, a proper luau by all accounts. I sadly missed out on what was a superb night with the last coach coming home at six in the morning.

On Sunday there were a few sore heads and some very delicate tattooists heading over from the hotel not three hundred yards from the venue. As the doors opened for the day, a few booths were unoccupied as I think a few of the harder partygoers had a bit of a lie in. It might be a good idea too put the party on the Sunday night after the show?

Again the rooms all filled up pretty quickly and those artists whose eyes had re-focused started the day's proceedings. Again the work heading up on stage for the competitions was immense with all genres of tattooing on show.

Sunday seemed a little quieter compared to the UK shows, where it is usually the busier day but it was never quiet and ninety nine percent of tattooists were working and those that weren't had decided not to by choice I think.

Just prior to the winding up of the show we were treated to a superb display of Dancing through the ages by a couple. Starting with a Charleston demonstration, then they dashed off behind a screen to reappear in WWII uniforms to do the jive, then off again to come back and dance some Rock and Roll. This was really good and considering both were well into their fifties, they put on a superb act and the audience loved it.

As the weekend drew to its final

conclusion, Andy handed out the awards that were hand made, painted surf boards to both artists and tattooees and the crowds started to wander off and the Kaiser Friedrich Hall began to empty.

The only fly in the ointment for me over the weekend was the rudeness and bullishness of one Tattoo Scout/Sprit magazine. When I mentioned their behaviour to others, they did not seem surprised, confirming this fitted with their understanding of the magazine's ethos. They decided to start filming artists in the one and only corridor to one of the tattoo rooms and when we and others decided to try and get to this room we were shouted at and told to leave the area. This denied access to many who wanted to get into the room housing the other artists. Not a nice way of treating their potential customers I feel. It was small and minor transgression, though but one I feel needed mentioning all the same.

I have driven through Germany on many occasions but never had the chance to stop but I am so glad I came over for the first Ink Explosion. It was a superb weekend. Chatting after the show with some of the artists, not one had a negative thing to say about the show and many were really looking forward to and some having already booked tattoos for next year.

Andy and his team did a superb job of keeping an incredible line up of artists happy (with a good selection of artists only seminars available) and making sure that the crowds enjoyed themselves for the whole weekend.

I know I did.

Considering the cheap flights and the superb quality and price of the local hotels, why not put the Ink Explosion on your convention list for next year?

I would like to thank Andy and his team for all their help and over the weekend. ★



TATTOO BY JIME LITWALK @ HART & HUNTINGTON, USA



SABASTIEN BY VOLKA @ BUENA VISTA TATTOO, GERMANY



TATTOO BY TONY MANCIA @ ALL OR NOTHING, USA