



Photo by Karrigan Monk

BB June, owner of Thistle and Pearl Tattoo, draws a design for a client.

Tattoo shops make their mark on Asheville

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Walk downtown and you will pass several tattoo shops. On the way there, you probably passed several more and those are just the ones with prime real estate locations. Elsewhere in Asheville, there are dozens more.

For someone looking to get a tattoo in Asheville, the task can be daunting. Advice can be found in comment sections online, “best of” lists and word of mouth. Perhaps the best way to find the perfect artists is to simply visit the shops themselves. In fact, many artists welcome new clients to come in to view portfolios in person.

Kimi Leger, owner of Sacred Lotus Tattoo, was named Best Tattoo Artist of 2016 by *Mountain Xpress*. She received this honor after almost 13 years of tattooing in Asheville.

“I apprenticed in more of a street-style

shop and I wanted to open a place that just felt really comfortable — almost Zen-like,” Leger said. “A place where people could come in and just feel relaxed and have a more custom approach to the tattoos and have an atmosphere that is as least intimidating as possible.”

As a child, Leger was always interested in drawing and the idea of putting her art on someone permanently in the form of a tattoo.

When she was 18, she began hanging around a tattoo shop where she would just watch and ask questions. At the age of 21, she landed a formal apprenticeship.

Since then, Leger became a prolific artist who is well known for her cover-ups, something she is taking a break from at the moment.

“I’ve taken on so many really challenging cover-ups. I think at this point cover-ups are probably my least favorite,” Leger said. “They’re still very

satisfying, but it sort of limits how you can do your art because you’re working around an obstacle.”

Leger’s favorite tattoos deal with objects from the natural world. She said she really enjoys plants and animals, as well as geometric blackwork and sacred geometry.

Another tattoo artist in Asheville, BB June, owner of Thistle and Pearl Tattoo, also enjoys tattooing botanical pieces, in addition to aesthetically pleasing and meaningful pieces.

“I really love transforming. I’ve had clients who have scars and they use tattoos to camouflage it or draw attention away from it, and one of the best parts of my job is when you do a tattoo and afterward the client is so grateful,” June said. “I’ve had people cry. I’ve had it be life-changing for people because they went from one day feeling insecure and not confident because of these scars and then the next day not only confident, but

that they want to show people.”

Like Sacred Lotus Tattoo, Thistle and Pearl try to make the tattoo environment as comfortable as possible for clients. The lobby of the shop features comfortable couches and the entire shop is decorated in a way that makes it feel less like a business and more like visiting a friend.

What makes Thistle and Pearl Tattoo stand out for many clients is the fact they use Eternal Ink, a vegan ink. While this is a popular ink brand and many other shops may use it in conjunction with other brands, Thistle and Pearl uses it exclusively.

“The FDA isn’t involved at all in ink,” June said. “So people could be putting whatever they want into it and calling it tattoo pigment and no one’s checking to make sure that there’s no carcinogens or that it’s even safe.”

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