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Poke Your Friends: Tattoo Culture at Seattle University

Liam Lawless , Staff Reporter

Tattooing maintains a longstanding significance in cultures across the globe. Machinery and industrialization brought the art form into the modern era, making tattooing more widespread and accessible. At Seattle University, some creative students are embracing the tradition with fresh, artistic passion.

One of a handful of students who have taken the time to learn the craft, third-year business marketing major Nicole Scoggins, made her way into tattooing through drawing, something she's been doing since she was a child.

"[Even] when I was younger, I always knew I wanted to get tattoos, so I've always wanted to be a part of that community," Scoggins explained. "But it wasn't until I got my first one. I was really inspired by my artist that I go to all the time [now] to want to become a tattoo artist. I had so much respect for her--I was like, 'wow I can actually do this.' Her words and her story were so inspirational."

Inspired like any driven artist upon encountering a new medium, Scoggins learned early on just how much work and attention to detail each tattoo demands.

"The way she brought it up to me made it seem really easy," Scoggins said. "Doing it myself is definitely not easy, and I can see how much hard work it takes to become [a tattoo artist]--that made me want to do it even more."

Brimming with creative ambition, Scoggins dove headfirst into her tattooing aspirations.

"I did a barbed-wire heart [first], and I didn't even practice on fake skin because why not just try it?" Scoggins recounted. "If I can do it on myself, I can do it on other people."

In the time since then, Scoggins has built a foundation of tattooing technique on top of her artistic ability. Her current personal endeavor is a dagger on her own leg.

"It's still unfinished because it's a really really big piece and I wanted it to be perfect," Scoggins said. "Tattooing on yourself is very hard."

Having been raised in a contemporary tattoo culture, Fourth-year Environmental Science major Ruby Rañoa always knew that they were going to be a part of the creative, tattooed community.

"As the child of two fully tattooed parents and being raised in my local punk scene, getting tattoos was never even a question for me!" Rañoa explained. "It was always going to happen, it was more of a question of what to get and when."



As a result, it is no surprise that Rañoa actively engaged in the community at a young age.

"I gave my first stick and poke to my dad when I was 12 since he thought it would be funny," Rañoa said. "Over the years, I've given myself, family and friends countless stick and pokes. I think they're a fun way to commemorate the moment since you can pretty much tattoo yourself anywhere, as long as everything is sanitary of course."

Permanent embellishments and making memories appears to be the most common theme in cultures and communities that practice tattooing. Given their accessibility, stick and poke tattoos have etched their place within the Seattle U student body. Student artists like Lex Ziegler, a fourth-year English major who picked up the medium in early quarantine, loves the art for the connections it creates.

"It's always been communal to me," Ziegler said. "Come over, we can hang out, eat dinner, and I can give you this little piece of art on your body."

Stick and poke tattoos are entirely composed of single needle strokes, making each piece of art a meticulous array of tiny details. When one person takes the time to weave their creativity into someone else's skin, deeper connections are bound to arise.

"It's really sweet to trust another person to design or put [a tattoo] on you," Zeigler said. "It's really intimate, the whole process is really vulnerable. I think that even if you end up not liking your tattoo later in time, it's a mark of where you've been, like a progress checkpoint."

Like both Scoggins and Rañoa, Ziegler started small and simple with linework flowers and other flash pieces. As they've progressed, Ziegler has tattooed several friends and Seattle U students with increasingly complex designs including a duck who stole a slice of bread, a pirate frog and the Fresno Nightcrawler.

"I would encourage people to try it, doing it with your friends makes it fun. Go get one!" Ziegler exclaimed. "They always come with a good story."

Art has always brought people together through the innately human nature of creativity. Seattle U students are wearing the connections fostered by each other's art on their sleeves, making memories along the way.