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# TAT TIME



BY ARCADIA

## Best of The Big Apple



Sometimes it seems like there just ain't nothing new in the world of tattoos—I think I'll scream if I see one more black panther or "mom" heart.

I live in New York, where people tend to wear either the absolute worst or the absolute best in skin art. Scratchers abound in the Big Apple, probably because tattooing is illegal here, and those scum-suckers thrive in the underground atmosphere just like maggots thrive on a rotting corpse. But we do have some righteous artists here and without a doubt the absolute best of them is a dude named Jonathan Shaw.

I saw his work before I actually met him. His tattoos looked like tribal work, but it was tribal with a twist: highly stylized pat-

terns swirling up and around a forearm, densely black, complex curves circling a wrist, hyper-detailed machine parts ripping out of a gearhead's chest, twisted psychedelia in eye-searing tints...all done by somebody named Jonathan Shaw. All of a sudden it seemed like everybody in New York was wearing this guy's art. Just eyeball the pics on these pages and you'll see why.

Well, you know I had to have a piece of this action for myself. But Jonathan's art isn't easy to access. I figured I could just show up at his studio and get a tattoo. No way. Jonathan works on an appointment only basis so he can give each client his undivided attention. No dropping in, wandering through, or cruising by this stu-



dio. So I called to set up an appointment. He said the first free time he had was a couple of weeks down the road. Dangling a writeup in this rag before his eyes didn't expedite matters either. This guy isn't exactly hurting for work.

Well, the big day finally arrived (actually the big night—Jonathan is a nocturnal critter) and I showed up at his Lower East Side studio. It's not your run-of-the-mill-shop either. There's no flash on the walls, except for an antique turn-of-the-century set. There are piles of photo albums though, and I paged through them, marveling at Jonathan's talent.

If you're thinking by now that Jonathan Shaw is some wussy conceited art dude, you're wrong. You don't want to show up at his studio and rudely



inquire if the needles are clean or try to lay some inane bullshit rap on this artist. He doesn't have an attitude problem, but he is a professional and expects to be treated like one. He's into doing clean, solid tattooing on people who can appreciate the quality of work that he creates. We're talking mutual respect between artist and client here. If you're getting real tired of artsy attitudes and tattoo artists who need to be your best friend and confidante, this is the place to go.

Jonathan likes working with people who have already seen his work and are confident of his abilities. "It's much easier on both the client and me if they are aware of the kind of work I do," he says. "Once people get in my chair I want them to relax. They don't have to be an art director with me. Just kick back, cool out and let me do my job."

Despite his fresh slant on tattoo designs, Jonathan is from the old school. He apprenticed with one of the grand old men of tattooing, his uncle Bob

Shaw, and he has no time or patience for the new kids who want nothing more than fast fame, fortune and females from tattooing.

"It seems like nobody wants to pay their dues anymore, but you can't learn tattooing from a book or a video," Jonathan observes. The only way you can learn to tattoo is to do an apprenticeship with a professional tattoo artist."

Anyway, I got a fantastic piece of skin art from Jonathan Shaw that night and left his studio with a great deal of respect for this man and his art. In a world full of plastic people turning out substandard garbage, it's a joy to meet people who are masters of their craft. People who take pride in their work and do it right. There's an awful lot of bullshit artists in the tattoo world and only a few real artists. Want some serious skin art by someone who's serious about his art? Give Jonathan Shaw a call at (212) 228-8851 in New York or in California (213) 465-2767. Go ahead, don't you deserve the best?