



In loving memory of Robert

# HAPPY TATTOOS

The Best Fun-Loving  
Tattoo Artists



SVEN RAYEN & TI RACOVITA

**Lannoo**

# FOREWORD

— SVEN RAYEN

Happy tattoos are serious business. As they should be.

Tattoos can give you strength, help you grieve, or simply serve as a reminder of who you are and - over time - once were. What you cared about, what made you laugh, what risks you took, what you found comfort in. They're personal archives written in ink, as intimate and permanent as memory allows.

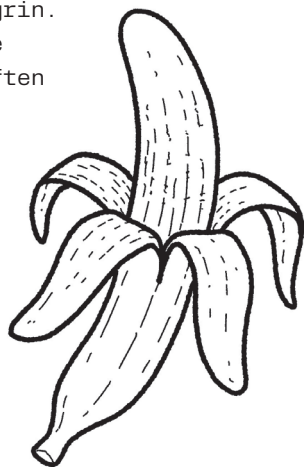
To the casual observer, a silly tattoo might look like the result of an impulsive decision. But even a velociraptor on a skateboard or a farting skunk can carry genuine emotional weight. Humour is layered. And tattoos - even the ones that make you laugh - are often rooted in something more than just a punchline.

In this third volume of our series, we've put together a carefully curated selection of tattoo artists from around the world who specialise in joyful, funny and flat-out happy artwork. These tattoos aren't just jokes on skin - they're small, permanent celebrations. They capture memories, honour moments, or simply reflect someone's



way of facing the world with a grin. There's beauty in choosing to be light-hearted in a world that often feels heavy.

When you tattoo someone regularly over the years, you start to get a sense of their life. Every session - short or long - adds a new piece to the puzzle. With some clients, we've seen partners come and go, parents pass away, and little bundles of joy arrive on the scene. As a tattoo artist, it's a privilege to be trusted with something that personal and to help mark those milestones.



At Studio Palermo, my colleague Ti and I spend quite a bit of time on consultations before the actual tattooing begins. For us, it's about understanding the motivation behind the idea, giving certain projects the attention they deserve. It was no different with one young man in 2021.

The sporadic consultations with Ti and tattoo sessions with me slowly turned into a friendship. Robert had a natural warmth, a kind of quiet charm. Over time, we learnt that Robert was sick, and had been for a while. To the extent that the hope of a full recovery was growing thin. Nonetheless, Robert was most joyful and warm of character.

As his treatments got more intense, he didn't stop getting tattoos. In fact, he started choosing funnier and funnier designs. It was as though the worse things got, the harder he leaned into joy. One of the last pieces we gave him was a peeled banana on his forearm - small and simple, but an iconic symbol of slapstick comedy and of not taking anything too seriously, even when everything around you seems to suggest you should.

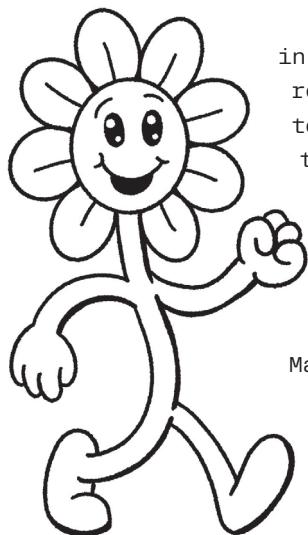
Near the end, he was spending most of his time in a hospital bed. His tattoos, he said, were all he had left to express himself. And if that banana could make the nurses smile? That was enough for him.

Robert passed away in early 2022. Not long after, we got a message from his family, whom we'd never met, inviting us to his memorial. Robert had spoken about his tattoos with such love and pride that they felt we were part of his story.

Sometimes, a happy tattoo isn't about being funny. Sometimes, it's a quiet, powerful act of defiance. A choice to laugh. A declaration of joy - even when joy is hard to find.

### HAPPY REBELLION

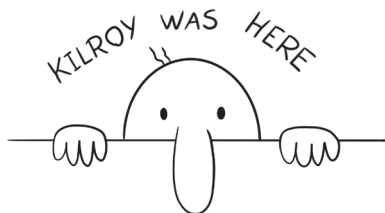
If there's one constant running through this book, it's this: people often get happy tattoos not just because they feel joyful, but because they strive to be. Uplifting images, nostalgic cartoons, absurd characters and vibrant colours act like little emotional anchors. Symbols that say: 'This is who I want to be in the world.'



Happy tattoos are affirmations in ink. Sometimes they're reminders to not take life too seriously. Sometimes they're reminders that the person survived something. Sometimes they're just reminders to laugh, even if it's through gritted teeth.

Artists like Woozy Machine or Mr. Heggie have made dark and cynical humour their signature style. Their tattoos walk a fine line between the hilarious and the

haunting - absurd designs  
with goofy captions  
that border on the  
philosophical. Their  
work is smart,  
strange and often  
laugh-out-loud funny.  
Jolly, but never  
lightweight. Their pieces  
are loaded with meaning, and  
often come from a place of deep feeling.



In a world that often rewards seriousness and superficiality, choosing joy can feel like rebellion.

### **WHEN DID TATTOOS BECOME HAPPY?**

Ask someone what the first intentional act of art was, and they'll probably say cave paintings, some of which date back 45,000 years. But body modification - tattooing, scarification, piercing - may be just as old.

Archaeologists point to etched patterns on Upper Palaeolithic figurines, like the Löwenmensch (lion-man) or the Venus of Hohle Fels, as early representations of tattooing. Ötzi the Iceman - Europe's oldest known natural mummy - had over sixty tattoos, many on pressure points, possibly for pain relief. Tattoos were mostly marks of status, symbols of spirituality, forms of medicine, even tools of punishment. There was little room for humour.

So when did we start tattooing jokes on ourselves?

That's much harder to pin down, but it likely emerged with the rise of modern and postmodern individuality, and possibly with 19th-century circus culture. In those spaces, tattoos were both performance and rebellion. They were a sign of otherness, but also pride.

One early example mentioned sex workers in the early 1900s with tattoos like 'Keep off the

grass' or 'Admission: 50 cents' tattooed on their pubic area.

Or the 'Kilroy was here' doodle, which emerged during World War II as a ubiquitous form of graffiti among American servicemen. Though the exact origins of the symbol remain debated - often attributed to ship inspector James Kilroy or variations of British and Australian doodles - it quickly became an iconic marker of American presence across the globe. Scrawled on walls, military equipment and in the ruins of battlefields from Europe to the Pacific, the phrase served both as a humorous declaration and a morale-boosting sign that 'Kilroy', meaning the United States military, had been there.

The symbol also became a popular tattoo theme among soldiers. Often etched onto arms, shoulders or other parts of the body, the Kilroy figure served as a personalised badge of identity, camaraderie and shared experience. These tattoos reflected not only a soldier's physical journey through wartime landscapes but also their emotional connection to the broader culture of resilience and gallows humour that sustained troops during the hardships of combat.

'Kilroy was here' continues to resonate as a symbol of historical memory, with new generations adopting the motif in tribute to its layered meanings - blending nostalgia, defiance and solidarity.

### **THE SELF AS CANVAS**

In modern society, identity was still tied to roles, institutions and grand narratives - you were defined by your job, class, religion or nation. Postmodern society, by contrast, celebrates the individual as a fluid, self-defined being. Authenticity, personal expression and the freedom to construct one's own identity take centre stage. The self becomes a canvas - sometimes literally, in the form of tattoos



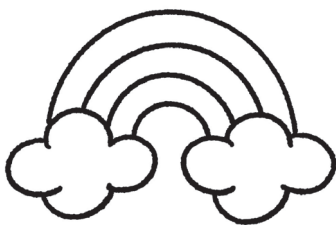
- reflecting the shift from collective meaning to personal significance.

It is in that perspective that happy tattoos come into play. Fashion designer Marc Jacobs famously has a SpongeBob SquarePants cartoon tattooed on his arm as a tribute to whimsy in an industry known for taking itself far too seriously. And *Jackass* star Steve-O has a full back tattoo of his own smiling face and two thumbs up. It's so absurd, it loops back into a strange kind of sincerity. Whether it's a grinning frog with sunglasses, a slice of pizza with angel wings, or a cartoon shouting nonsense - tattoos like this live in a space between humour and seriousness, unimaginable 50 years ago.

The artists featured in this volume understand something crucial: joy is a craft. It takes real skill to make someone laugh, especially when that laugh has to live on skin forever. Creating happy tattoos is not about dismissing seriousness, but about expanding the emotional range of what tattooing can express. These artists understand that the world is complicated. Because grief exists. Because burnout is real. Because joy can be fleeting, and choosing to hold on to it, to mark it permanently, is a brave thing.

So, whether it's a rainbow cowboy boot, a raccoon eating spaghetti, or a badly drawn potato saying something profound, these tattoos are monuments to being human. They're weird and wonderful and deeply necessary.

So here's to the peeled bananas. The googly eyes. The misspelled words. The silliness. The rebellion. The joy.



# INDEX

## TATTOO ARTISTS

PAGE	ARTIST	LOCATION
012-019	01. 88world	SOUTH KOREA / WORLDWIDE
020-027	02. Agataris	PORTUGAL
028-035	03. Anshin Anshin	UK
036-045	04. Baby Asteroid	PORTUGAL
046-055	05. Buoy The Fishlover	CANADA
056-063	06. Dennis Bebenroth	GERMANY
064-073	07. Dior the Artist	USA
074-085	08. Eddy Prickstick	BELGIUM
086-101	09. Happyfishhead	USA
102-113	10. Hello Numi	SPAIN
114-123	11. Horimitsu	JAPAN
124-131	12. Kiwis n' Trees	USA
132-139	13. Koblin	SOUTH KOREA
140-155	14. Linda Flowers	ITALY
156-173	15. Lipne Tattoo	POLAND
174-183	16. Lonely Weirdo Club	GERMANY
184-195	17. Mambo Tattooer	ITALY
196-205	18. Mr. Heggie	USA
206-213	19. Nancydestroyer	SPAIN
214-221	20. PISATCHÉ	SOUTH KOREA
222-229	21. Rooooseblue	TAIWAN
230-239	22. ssun_from_love	GERMANY
240-247	23. u_oooops	SOUTH KOREA
248-255	24. Winston the Whale	USA
256-267	25. Woozy Machine	UK

# 88WORLD

South Korea / worldwide

88world is a South Korean pixel tattoo artist who travels the world sharing unique designs inspired by cartoons, video games and pop culture.

Since the start of his tattoo career in 2018, 88world has specialised in pixel art, bringing iconic characters and scenes to life through a nostalgic and playful lens. Each tattoo blends the charm of retro gaming and classic animation with the precision of tattoo craftsmanship, creating pieces that resonate with fans of all ages.

More than just body art, 88world's tattoos are personal tributes - capturing memories, emotions and stories that have shaped each client's world. With every design, 88world brings joy, whimsy and a sense of comfort to the skin, turning nostalgia into a permanent, wearable experience.

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Victim families confront  
CROOKED ACCOUNTANTS  
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Miami real  
28 HO  
24

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