

A Man's World: Victoria St. Louis on being a female tattoo artist

In a small coffee shop in Providence, Victoria St. Louis described the ups and downs she experienced along her journey to becoming a female tattoo artist in Rhode Island. Her work not only displays her talent as a creative mind, but her ability to connect to her fellow humans despite sometimes facing adversity. St. Louis' art transcends the fine lines of drawing upon the shallow of the epidermis, and goes deeper into the heart and experience of those upon whom she leaves a lasting mark.

St. Louis, who originally went to school for mechanical engineering, decided to pursue tattooing after receiving body art helped her cope with problems she was experiencing in her personal life. Tattooing, though an outlet for emotional pain, was something St. Louis initially doubted she could master in any real capacity. Instead, she supported herself as a fine artist until she gained the confidence to pursue her passion. St. Louis' first tattoo was of a tiger with roses, given to a relative who was confident in St. Louis' abilities. When St. Louis expressed doubts about her final product, she was encouraged to continue by her supporters. And continue she did.



St. Louis' first tattoo depicting a tiger and some roses.

Looking for proper guidance to build a career was not easy, according to St. Louis. It's a male dominated profession, and the tattoo industry was not as welcoming to females. "There is no set way, no set degree for learning the art of tattooing simply because it's more contingent on the mentor's approach," St. Louis says. For this reason, St. Louis was at the mercy of those already established in the field and willing to teach her. It wasn't until she began working for fellow female artist Audrey Mello that she felt she was in a safe space to really explore her craft.

St. Louis expressed humility when describing the quiet by-appointment-only practice where she now works, a venue that allows her to get to know her clients one on one. To St. Louis, trust is the most important factor in the relationship between a tattoo artist and her client, and this cannot occur without meaningful interaction. St. Louis strives to create a comfortable space for her clients, both environmental and emotional. She sees the tattooing process as a collaborative effort where the client can openly communicate fears, doubts and questions, something St. Louis was not afforded in her apprenticeship. Sometimes, St. Louis finds, clients are afraid to express their feelings because they feel intimidated by the process. St. Louis hopes to help ease this by making sure the person is "110% comfortable."



St. Louis' recent work of art depicting a snake and some roses.

St. Louis still experiences prejudices in the industry despite her best efforts. "People say things that are disrespectful," says St. Louis. "Things that they wouldn't say if I were a man." Customers will tend to associate feminine art styles with female artists, when this is not necessarily the case and is detrimental to both male and female artists. It is hard also, St. Louis explains, to gain trust from clients when comparing her three years of experience to someone who has been working for 25 years. "Check out the person's portfolio," St. Louis encourages potential clients. "If their style matches up with what you are looking for, then that is your artist regardless of their sex." Still, St. Louis is hopeful that the art of tattooing is opening up more and more to women. She encourages women artists to communicate with each other and share their experience on the best ways to success. St. Louis's goal is to create a multi-services female run facility including hair, makeup and tattooing, with trust and security at the center of their services.

To view St. Louis's work, go to @tattooria.