

# MAKE YOUR MARK

PICTURES  
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TATTS AMORE SHOWS NO SIGNS OF ABATING AS A WAY TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD, WRITES **MEGAN MILLER**

**A**S THE weather warms up, they creep out from under T-shirts and bathers. There are dragons and damsels, tigers and love hearts, swords and Southern Cross stars, names of loved ones, passed and present.

There's no escaping tattoos and our ever-increasing love affair with ink. No session of pub, cafe or sporting arena people watching is complete without a couple of "Check out those tats".

They're no longer the province of bikies, sailors, inmates, drunks or bucks' night victims — all sections of society are inking up. Some are even getting their first work done in their 50s, 60s and beyond, and no one's blinking an eyelid.

Dr Julie Malone, a Sydney psychologist specialising in body image, says indigenous and native groups have been doing it for centuries — but our desire to stand out from the crowd is stronger than ever and more people are turning to ink-bearing needles in the quest.

"From a psychological perspective, people may be wanting to individualise themselves further from others. Having a unique body-art piece is one way of doing this, as is wearing certain clothes or dying your hair a different colour," Malone says.

"In our increasingly fast-paced world, people may be losing their sense of self, and body art may make them feel more connected with who they are and what they believe in, or what is important to them."

After three stints in Sydney, Ric Sedin is bringing the Tattoo and Body Art Expo to Melbourne for the first time. He says that these days tattoos are more an expression of art than rebellion against traditional

society. "There's such a big arts culture in Melbourne and that lends itself to the whole tattoo scene," he says.

"Not only do many tattoo artists work on people, but they're artists in their own right as well, working on canvas, or with spray cans, graffiti art.

"Tattoos are also a personal expression of who you are. That's the reason I have them. I've got a *Star Wars* sleeve. To look at me, you'd have no idea the type of person I am, but when people see that on my arm, it gives them an insight into my interests. It's a way of showing them my personality on the outside."

Sedin says formal studies on tattooing are lacking, but anecdotally 18 to 35-year-olds are the main recipients, and more are female. "Because you're taking in more of the smaller works, ladies get more work done than men, but for the biggest pieces, definitely more men," he says.

"People no longer choose a stencil off the wall or do a butterfly on their back. It's a custom piece of artwork where they work with the artist."

Bigger, intricate work can take up to 50 hours over several sittings, with a good artist charging up to \$250 an hour.

But Malone warns that people shouldn't see tattoos as fashion accessories and should do their homework before a session at the tattoo parlour.

"There are ways of having them removed, but apparently it is expensive and painful, hence the importance of thinking about your tattoo and even trying it out in a non-permanent way first."

**The Tattoo and Body Art Expo will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from Friday to September 18. [tattooexpo.com.au](http://tattooexpo.com.au)**

