

Dogs as tattoo subjects

The practice of tattooing goes back thousands of years with cultures including Polynesians, Nubians, Greeks, South Americans and Siberian nomads all using tattoos. In modern day New Zealand, tattoos are commonplace. Most resources I could locate state that an estimated 20% of Kiwis have at least one tattoo.

I have noticed that many of my clients sport a tattoo of at least one beloved dog. I sat down for a conversation with Christchurch-based tattoo artist Lisa Ovington to learn more about the professional practice of a tattoo artist. "I complete an Applied Arts degree and then went on to do a tattoo apprenticeship at Steve Johnson's City of Ink. After three years working there, I became self-employed working out of my own studio," says Lisa.

In her six years of professional practice, Lisa has done at least one dog tattoo every month.

Styles of tattoos will vary according to the wishes of the client. "Some are just simple outlines, some are more complex portraits and some will represent the dog without being a portrait — for example, a daisy flower for a dog named Daisy."

Dog lovers of all genders and ages commission tattoos and most are commissioned after the death of a loved dog. This can make it challenging for Lisa if the client does not have a good photo of the dog.



"The best photos to work from are ones that show any special features that are unique to that pet, or ones that from a distance create a nice silhouette. Sometimes I get given a few photos which I then mash together to get the final design."

Lisa is also a dog lover who is mum to two Pugs.

"As a dog lover myself I absolutely love tattooing them for other people. I think pet tattoos warm your heart each time you see them, whether the dog is still with us or not. Dogs are such a big part of our families; it is so great to be reminded of them in a permanent way which is what a tattoo offers."

For budgeting purposes, a small custom piece starts at approximately \$200. As size and level of detail increases, so will the cost. It is best to talk to your tattoo artist in advance for a cost estimate.

For those of you who are not ready to commit to a tattoo, artists like Lisa also take on art commissions such as these plates for display. 