

JULY 2013

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women

Tattoo Flash presents

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**PARADISE TATTOO
GATHERING**

**16 PAGES OF
GEOMETRIC
TATTOOING**

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VERONA

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY JOHN WYATT

Tattoo artist
Anna Melo,
Thom DeVita,
and author
Kate Monahan



Thom DeVita ART EVENT AT KINGS AVENUE TATTOO



Clayton Patterson,
Oliver Peck, DeVita,
and Forrest Cavacco

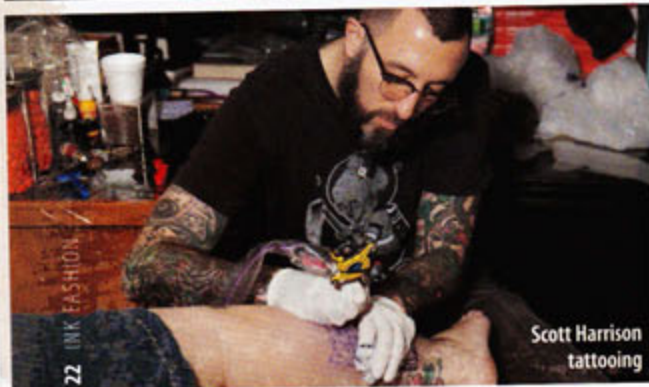
Looking Leonard Cohen-esque in his sport coat and fedora, legendary 80-year-old tattoo artist Thom DeVita met with hundreds of fans over a three-day period in January at Mike Rubendall's Kings Avenue Tattoo in New York—not far from where DeVita last tattooed on the lower East Side in the '70s.

Legendary singer-songwriter Cohen and DeVita not only share a commonality in fashion, but they are both true originals in their respective art. They're both Renaissance men and attract legions of fans from all age groups. In DeVita's case,

the first people he made an impact on were Mike Malone, Ed Hardy, and Nick Bubash. All of them said he had a profound influence on their tattooing, as well as their other artwork—primarily because DeVita was so original and unique and showed them they did not have to do what other people do, that they could change the standards. Scott Harrison, from the next generation, found a mentor in DeVita and was also influenced by him, as was Robert Ryan from the next, younger generation.

Rubendall generously opened his tattoo shop, which is a large loft on the second floor in the Bowery, for three days for DeVita to display and sell his artwork

to his many admiring fans. The event came about through Chris Grosso, the producer who did a five-part documentary on DeVita (which can be seen at vice.com/tattoo-age). The video received half a million hits before the event. Grosso, and other people who produced the video, appeared at the gallery along with tattooers Scott Harrison, Robert Ryan, Clayton Patterson, Robert Ryan, Tony Polito, and Nick Bubash, who also appeared in the video. Bubash previously produced limited-edition box sets of work by DeVita and other artists that sold out in an art gallery within a month. Ed Hardy later published the book *DeVita Unauthorized* based



Scott Harrison
tattooing



DeVita artwork



Nick Bubash and Mike Peretto showing their DeVita tattoos



Oliver Peck, Nick Bubash, and Scott Harrison



DeVita artwork



Tattoo artist Chris O'Donnell



Mike Rubendall

on the portfolio. The video and book helped to make DeVita more well known. For most of his career, he was virtually unknown, except for some major tattoo artists who he influenced.

At Kings Avenue, people in their 20s were coming by the dozens to pay tribute to DeVita and buy his artwork. They approached DeVita like they were greeting the Dalai Lama. Many of them tattoo in the New York area and understand why he is a pioneer and somewhat the godfather of contemporary tattooing in New York. DeVita began tattooing in the Lower East Side in his apartment in the '60s, when it was illegal. Unlike tattoo shops of the

day that used flash ordered from companies, DeVita's flash art was original, many times Japanese influenced, and sometimes painted on dark green or red board. Additionally, DeVita may have been one of the only people at the time doing tattoo-related drawings, tracings, and assemblages. A self-taught artist, DeVita has a great sense of composition and made original art that appeared primitive and could be considered folk art. His work included references to tattooing but never looked just like tattoo flash, which is so often done. His work included many other images, such as tracings of found tools, various stamps, word references to tattooing,

brush strokes, rubbings, and photocopies on wood.

While DeVita was at one end of the gallery hosting people, Rubendall and his crew of some of the world's best tattoo artists, such as Chris O'Donnell and Grez, were buzzing away on clients. Scott Harrison came from Portland, Oregon, and Oliver Peck from Dallas to see their good friend, DeVita, and both did tattoos on people who had the good fortune to be at the gallery.

One of the people in her 20s, Genna Howard, came to the opening after learning of DeVita from her painting instructor Thomas Woodruff at the School of Visual Arts. Woodruff's work was on the cover of



DeVita at his art event at Kings Avenue

"THEY APPROACHED DEVITA LIKE THEY WERE GREETING THE DALAI LAMA."



Genna Howard's leg with DeVita tattoo by Grez from wooden DeVita box



Robert Ryan and Thom DeVita



Tattoo artists Rodrigo and Anna Melo



Chris Grosso, Mike Rubendall, and Nick Bubash

Ed Hardy's *TattooTime*, which he showed to Howard. There was an article about DeVita in that issue, and Howard immediately connected with DeVita's work and sensibility. When she found out he would be at the opening, she came to get work from Grez: a drawing on one of DeVita's wood boxes (which Oliver Peck bought) of a cross that DeVita uses in his work. A highlight for the art student was to have DeVita photograph the work in progress and give his seal of approval. It was also a highlight to the veteran tattoo artists and friends of DeVita to see him influence and inspire yet another generation and keep his art alive.

DeVita's artwork is for sale. Inquiries can be made at headbandbrothers.com for portfolios, or thomdevita.wordpress.com to buy individual pieces.