

# Miami Ink's Kat

## Kat Scratch Fever!

by [jasonsweet\\*](#) 🌸

October 30, 2005

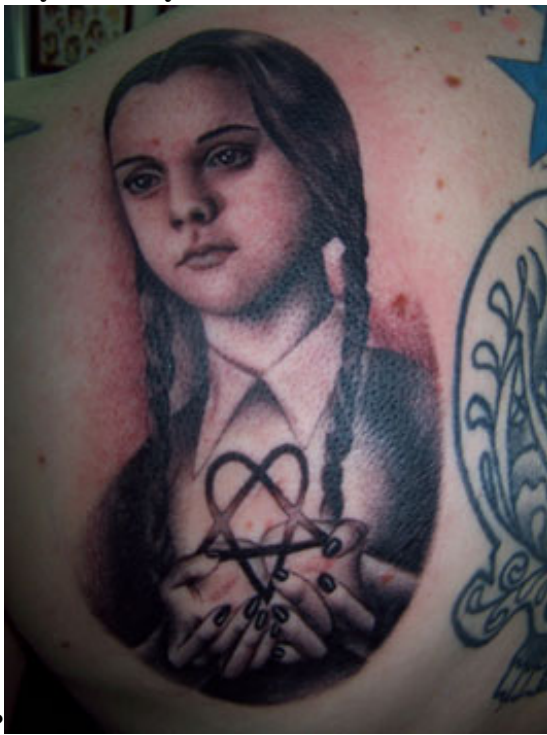


*Kat Von D is a shining star in the tattoo world. She works at one of the hottest tattoo shops in Los Angeles and is a guest artist on the television show Miami Ink. She is a classic gangster style black and gray tattoo artist. At 23, Kat has already been tattooing for 9 years. She is in such high demand that to get an interview with her required two weeks notice. During our interview she confessed that she has had to hire an assistant to manage her hectic schedule. Despite her busy schedule and new found television stardom, Kat remains a humble person who focuses her entire energy to tattooing. In our interview she shares her hard fought beginning as a tattoo artist, her opinions on tattoo reality shows and what it is like to be a female tattoo artist in an industry dominated by men.*

**Jason Sweet: Where are you from?**

**Kat:** My family is from Argentina. They are missionaries for the Church. They traveled around the world and were working in Mexico setting up clinics for poor people. My brother and I were born in Mexico. We came to America in the early eighties and I have been a southern California girl since then.

**How old were you when you moved to Southern**



**California?**

We moved to the Inland Empire here in California when I was four years old.

**When did you start creating art?**

I was drawing since I was old enough to hold a pencil. My parents have kept all my drawing from when I was a kid.

**How old were you when you started tattooing?**

I started tattooing seriously when I was 14 and I started working in a professional tattoo shop when I was 16 and I dropped out of high school two weeks into that job.

**That's pretty young! What led you to start tattooing?**

I was hanging out with a lot of punk rockers. There was this one punk rock kid and he would come around and tattoo us all ghetto style with homemade equipment. I did my first tattoo in him, it was a Misfits skull. I liked it and I have done it since.



**How old are you now?**

I am 23.

**Did you apprentice?**

I did not go through a formal apprenticeship, but when I started working in tattoo shops I learned from the people I worked for. The first job I had my boss taught me about sterilization and maintaining my equipment. Even to this day I am still learning through critique.

**What shop was this in?**

It was Sin City Tattoo in San Bernardino, California, in the heart of the ghetto.

**Were you broken in doing a lot of names?**

Oh yeah, a lot of East LA tribal and handwriting. [Writers note: East LA Tribal is a Southern California slang term for Old English lettering.]

**Do you feel there was anything negative starting so young?**

It was good because I already have a bit of time under my belt, but if I had gone through an apprenticeship I wouldn't have had to unlearn all the things I was doing wrong for the first two years. Maybe I might have gotten better faster.

**You went from the ghetto to one of the biggest power shops in Southern California. How did you end up at a shop like True Tattoo?**



It's crazy! I left Sin City after one year and then I worked

at three different shops in Pasadena [California] before I moved to True Tattoo. I have been here for about a year. I knew Chris Garver and Clay Decker before they opened True Tattoo. I got married right around the time they opened the shop to a man that has a shop in Dallas, Texas and I was traveling back to Dallas a lot. I wanted a place that I could do my appointments at and they offered me a job.

### **Who are you married to?**

Oliver Peck and he is the owner of Elm Street Tattoo in Dallas, Texas.

### **You are quite the jet setting tattoo artist. Working in LA and traveling back and forth between Dallas and Miami!**

Yeah, it's pretty crazy!

### **How do you feel you measure up to the other artists here at True Tattoo? There are real heavy hitters who work here!**

It is pretty intimidating. I manage to keep up and I am learning a lot. Tim Hendrix who works here is a friend of mine; we used to work together at Inflections Tattoo. He is

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like my big bother and we have a similar style. Now working together again is like a family thing. Working with Chris and Clay is awesome. They are like mentors to me.

**Do you have a style you like to work in?**

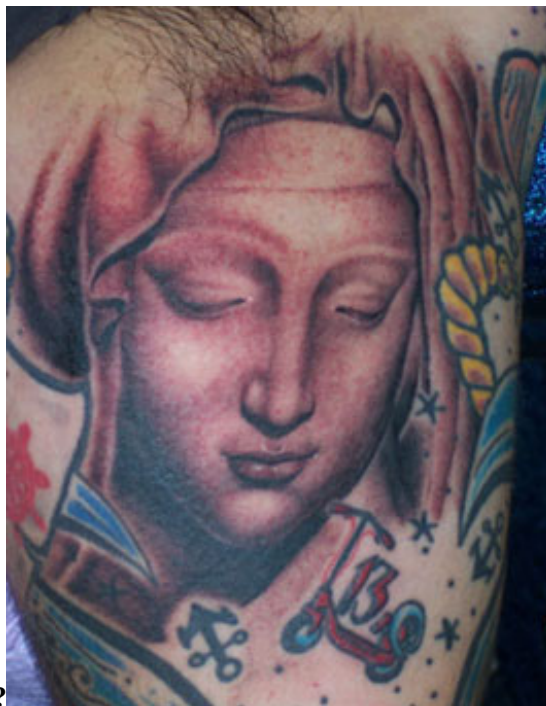
Black and gray, portraits, realism, fine line and gangster shit. I do some color work, but it is not my forte, I prefer black and gray.

**That would make you a true LA tattoo artist.**

Yeah! I am in love with being in love with LA. I love Los Angeles. One thing about LA is that it is the hot spot for black and gray tattooing. You cannot get that same LA look from East Coast tattooing. Not to say that they do not do good black and gray work, it just does not have that LA black and gray style.

**How did you manage to land a spot on Miami Ink?**

Well, because reality television is not really reality. Darren Brass who is on the show really did break his elbow, but the network used that situation to introduce me because they wanted a female on the show. I think they were interviewing other girls but Ami and Chris Garver were rooting for me so I got chosen.



**How do you like being on a reality TV show?**

The show can be annoying because the cameras are always in your face. I do not want to sound coldhearted or anything, but obviously the show is aimed to please the viewers of America so they are always looking for the story behind every tattoo. In reality we're not people's therapists and I am not one to ask someone what the meaning of their tattoo is. That was kind of annoying because we needed to stop between every tattoo and interview and ask the them what the tattoo meant. It was super draining but I am not trying to be insensitive because I do care.

**Have you watched yourself?**

Once I did. It was kind of weird. I am not sure I like it.

**Did you enjoy being on the show?**

I had mixed feelings about it. It was one of those things where a lot people thought it was a bad idea and we were selling out the tattoo industry, but I figured if it wasn't going to be me, then it was going to some other chick. I would have been really bummed if they hired some talentless person just because she

was hot. I felt that I needed to represent. Me and Clay were talking about it the other day and we decided that if you are a good tattooer you can appreciate the show for what it is, because it is educating people



to a certain extent. Other tattooers that I have talked to since the show has aired are all stoked about people coming in and talking about it and looking at tattooing in different ways. The show has a kick ass team and they are a good representation of tattooing.

### **Have you gotten a response from your family and friends?**

Honestly, I have gotten a lot of support. I have a really conservative family so the tattoo thing is an issue, but they are super proud of me and they feel the show made me look like a nice person. I have gotten a lot emails from the public giving me props and tattooers have been good, too. The other day at California Pizza Kitchen the counter guy recognized me from the show and I did not have to wait in line.

What has bothered me is that I have been getting emails from super young girls that have been wanting to be tattoo artists. It is not what I am trying to promote.

### **What would say to a young girl that came walking into the shop and wanted to know how to get into tattooing?**

I have written emails to these girls with all the negative aspects of tattooing trying to scare them off. It sounds bad, but it looks more glamorous than it is and I think it is a pretty hard road to go



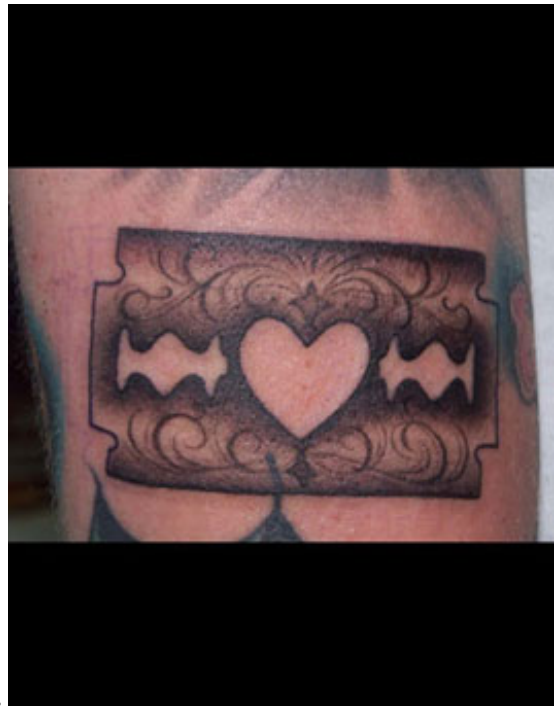
down. I think that people are born to tattoo. They are trying to find out how to get an apprenticeship or how to drop out of high school to tattoo. That is not something I want to promote. Especially for super young girls that have no clue. I am not sure how I managed to do it, I must have been crazy.

**As a female tattoo artist who started pretty young have you experienced any problems or discrimination?**

Everyone has been pretty nice, but since the beginning I have heard some people talk shit about being a girl, but I try not to pay attention because I do not want it to be an issue. I do want to be known as the female version of so and so; I just want to be Kat. I don't want to hear, "She's pretty good for a girl." I just want people to look at my tattoos and like them. It is pretty hard because sometimes I feel completely ignored by some of the guys.

**You are going to return to Miami?**

I leave on Halloween to film three episodes. It takes about a week to film one episode so I will be there for most of November.



**Are you going to be a regular or continue as a guest.**

I do not know. Everything is very last minute with TV people. They can call you tomorrow and expect you to drop everything and fly out the next day.

**Are you booked for tattoos far in advance?**

I am booked through January and I going to stop taking appointments in February and take a break.

**If someone wants to get a tattoo, how should they contact you?**

Kat: I had to get an assistant because of the amount of phone calls and emails I have been receiving. They can call 626-234-7018 and talk to Autumn, my assistant, or visit my web site, <http://www.katvond.net/>.