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A stitch in time

Tattoo artist Nicole May hard at work. / PROVIDED

Fresh ink. Grandma would totally approve of this tattoo trend.

Maybe it's because of Etsy. Maybe it's because of those NSFW needlepoint pillows taking over Pinterest. Whatever the reason, cross-stitch tattoos are having a moment.

Eva Karabudak, a Turkish tattoo artist based in Ankara, has become world famous for mastering the trend. "I used to do cross-stitch on canvas and cloth at home and decided to do tattoos out of it," she tells us. At first, she tried it out on friends. She was hooked immediately.

"It's an anchor back to a lot of people's childhoods. That's why I believe it gets noticed," she says.

Nicole May, 38, a tattoo artist at Tiki Town Tattoo in Alberta, Canada, says she definitely has seen cross-stitch tattoos becoming increasingly popular. "I see a lot of subversive cross-stitch on Etsy, and I feel like it is something a lot of young people are picking up as a hobby," says May. "Cross-stitch tattoos have become popular along with the general trend of cross-stitch."

If you want to jump on the trend, her biggest tip is to find an artist who actually cross-stitches as a hobby. "They'll have a better understanding of design layout and execution," she says.

Here, three people share the stories behind their cross-stitch tattoos.



EMILY LAURENCE
@EmLaurence
emily.laurence@metro.us

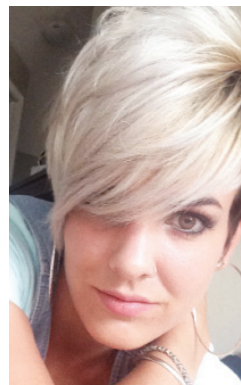
Ashley Rieck



Age: 31
Occupation: Manager of Unglued gift store
Location: Sioux Falls, South Dakota
"I own a cross-stitch business called Hatch605 and manage a modern makers gift store, so I am around makers all day. When people see my tattoo, I

typically get reactions from older generations because it evokes a nostalgic feeling. They always have to stop and tell me that either they or a loved one used to cross-stitch. I love hearing their stories. To me, it's a way to keep traditional art alive."

Brittany Wiebe



Age: 28
Occupation: Homemaker/cross-stitcher for hire
Location: Alberta, Canada
"I have a small business where I custom cross-stitch family portraits. On

all the portraits, I include a red heart that floats over the family. It's my signature. People find my tattoo very unique. The most recurring compliment I get is how much it suits me."

Crystal Balsler



Age: 35
Occupation: Owner of MOD Tattoo
Location: Ontario, Canada
"A fellow tattoo artist and I wanted to figure out how to do a cross-

stitch tattoo. We are both very crafty with crocheting and cross-stitching, so it just made sense. It's challenging, and we wanted to experiment, so I let her try it out on me!"

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Exhibit. Traction Company ponders what will happen if its studio disappears — meanwhile, members are making 8,000-pound pieces.

An 8,000-square-foot former trolley manufacturing warehouse in West Philadelphia is the workplace, gathering space and namesake for Traction Company, a 12-member arts collective made up of Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts alumni and faculty members. "Traction Company is both a thing and a place," explained PAFA director Harry Philbrick during a preview of the museum's latest exhibition.

Beyond the walls within which they make their art, however, space is a constant concern for Traction Company members. The neighborhood is always in flux, and the collective's home at 41st Street and Haverford Avenue is at the nexus of the expanding Penn and Drexel campuses. Having such an extravagant studio space is a luxury — the members fear — that may come to an abrupt end at any moment.

"We don't know the fate of our studio where all this magic happens," says Traction Company co-founder Billy Blaise Dufala. "The reality of that sit-

If you go

Traction Company

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Art on a grand scale

Art collective Traction Company is made up of PAFA alumni and faculty. / BARBARA KATUS

uation is tragic, and what's happening in that neighborhood is pretty tragic. There's student housing everywhere and people being forced out."

Dufala makes these foreboding points while standing beside his contribution to the exhibit: a 3,000-pound cast-iron sculpture made of life-size, action-figure-styled body

parts representing preadolescent suicide bombers.

Other dramatic pieces in the show include Brendan Keen's 14-foot wooden piece resembling a giant seed pod etched with a night starscape, John Greig Jr.'s elaborately mounted stone inspired by Chinese scholar stones and Joshua Koffman's plaster piece commissioned by St. Joseph's University for the pope's impending visit.

But the exhibition space is dominated by an enormous triangular wooden truss, weighing 8,000 pounds and measuring 64-by-14 feet. Built using mainly 19th-century construction processes, the truss is a full-scale replica of one of the trusses holding Traction Company's roof in place and was made using wood from a similar building in the neighborhood that had been demolished to make way for new condos.

"A lot of this exhibition is centered around this idea of what would happen if this building didn't exist," explains curator Jodi Throckmorton. "It's a memorial to the building if it were to disappear."



Morgan Dummitt works on a sculpture. / BARBARA KATUS



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