

Marking Untold Stories

Jalen Frizzell

To choose to tattoo your own body is a political statement for Black people. An act of self-affirmation.

When I started tattooing I never anticipated my work to go in the direction of being POC-focused, only because at the time I had been sipping my own cup of internalized racism. I hadn't realized anything was missing. It took time to understand—and is still an education I'm participating in every day. After two years of working reception at a tattoo shop, I'd learned how strongly I felt tattooing to be my calling, but also how much of myself I never saw in the industry. Black hair in tattoos or illustrations was never truly showcased for its beauty. An image of a pin-up or of any "attractive" person in a tattoo design would almost always have eurocentric features. And tattoo artists would be unsure of how to approach my skin tone.

A majority of the global population has melanated skin and non-eurocentric features. So why should we have to wear the faces of our colonizers in an experience that is literally transformative? My work, therefore, consists of two things: finding strategies for creating vibrant and lasting tattoos on melanated skin and exploring the possibilities of representation. We deserve to have the peace of mind that our tattoos will be beautiful for years to come. And we should also be able to see ourselves in what we have put on our bodies forever.

My tattoos evoke the Black experience with symbols of our everyday lives. Examples include tools for self-care, beloved items found in the homes of guardians who raised us, and other objects of our upbringing that shape us as Black people. I thank my mentor for seeing my potential and all of my clients for trusting me with their bodies. It is an honour to be a part of the tradition of tattooing, and I could not dream of something better than making art for my people. How interesting it is to think we can suture spiritual wounds by causing physical ones.



Jalen Frizzell, *Butterfly Lady Sketch*, 2017, pencil on paper, 3.5 × 6.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Afrobabe 1*, 2018, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 3.5 × 6 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Afrobabe 2*, 2018, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 3.5 × 6 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Shea Coulee Line Drawing*, 2017,
tracing paper and Micron fine liner,
4.5 × 8.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Josephine Baker Line Drawing*,
2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner,
5.5 × 10.75 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Strength and Perseverance Line Drawing*, 2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 5.5 × 10.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Black Love*, 2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner 4.75 × 8.25 inches