

## The Wrath of Kiyohime

Artworks by Adrian McGhie

The tattoo artist's craft is not one for the squeamish. It is a medium in which the painter's canvas gives way to exposed skin; the sculptor's chisel is replaced by a reciprocating needle; and the printmaker's inks are comingled with blood. The works it produces chain the permanence of traditional art to the impermanence of the human body. Save for [some rather grisly exceptions](#), tattoos are destined to decay alongside the mortal bodies upon which they are inscribed. Hours of an artist's work may never even be viewed by the public eye, hidden by clothing from all but those most intimately acquainted with the owner of the piece. Still, tattooing is a craft that has appealed to a diverse range of artists, both in Australia and abroad. Here, [Stanislava Pinchuk](#), [David Griggs](#) and [Leslie Rice](#) have all blurred the line between the gallery and the tattoo studio in their own different ways. People now travel across the country—and even the world—for bespoke tattoos by artists, such as [Sophia Baughan](#), who have cultivated idiosyncratic styles and thousands of followers on Instagram.

From the time he could hold a pencil, Adrian McGhie was drawn to the world of art and its creative possibilities. After spending his school years working on improving his artistic skills, it



came as no surprise when, in 2001, he enrolled in a bachelor's degree in graphic design with a major in illustration at James Cook University. At the end of his degree the artist's career took a direction some might consider a little more unusual, when, in 2004, he was offered a tattooist's apprenticeship. For McGhie it seemed like a natural fit, and it marked the beginning of his career as a tattoo artist. He is currently based in Townsville and has been working in the industry for well over a decade. Tattooing has enabled him to travel both around Australia and



Above: *The Wrath of Kiyohime*, ink and watercolour on illustration board, Adrian McGhie (2019).

abroad, and guest spots and conferences have led to him as far afield as Scotland, Wales, England, Canada and New Zealand. His work abroad has, in turn, sparked a love of travel in general that guides his approach to life and art. He suggests that “Japan has been one of the highlights; I love the culture and the folklore has been a big influence in my art recently.” The two pieces featured here are an example of the continuing impact of Japanese folklore on McGhie’s work.

“The Wrath of Kiyohime” and “Trash Dragon” were painted as part of the Deepwater

charity exhibition in Sydney, an event organised to raise money for [Australian Seabird Rescue](#). Drawn from a folktale about sexual desire and rage, “The Wrath of Kiyohime” depicts the maiden Kiyohime’s transformation into a terrifying serpent. Her lover was a monk named Anchin, who renounced his desire for her and fled across the Hidaka River by boat. Driven by a mixture of desire and hatred, Kiyohime threw herself into the river in pursuit of Anchin. In the turbulent waters of the Hidaka she was transformed. When she eventually caught her



Above: *Trash Dragon*, ink and watercolour on illustration board, Adrian McGhie (2019).

former lover hiding under a bell in the nearby temple of Dōjō-ji, she coiled herself around the bell and immolated the young monk with a gout of her fiery breath. McGhie's work invites a reflection on the complexities of love and the

paths that lead from apparently honourable actions to injustice, tragedy and disaster.

While "The Wrath of Kiyohime" directly references Japanese folklore, "Trash Dragon" plays with the conventional use of Japanese art

styles in contemporary tattoo culture. In “Trash Dragon,” the majesty of a traditional river dragon is disrupted by pieces of cartoonish detritus caught in its wake. With a discarded wrapper pinned to its horn, the dragon’s stylised glare also gives the hint of a frustrated rolling of the eyes. It all is, of course, a timely reminder of the way humanity continues to degrade the environment, and McGhie points out that the work was produced for Australian Seabird Rescue as a commentary on the impact of marine plastics. Whether nature’s wrath will ever surmount humanity’s capacity to destroy, however, remains to be seen.

A selection of McGhie’s work can be found on [Instagram](#).