

WORDS:
KENDALL LUKAS



Punked Chucks

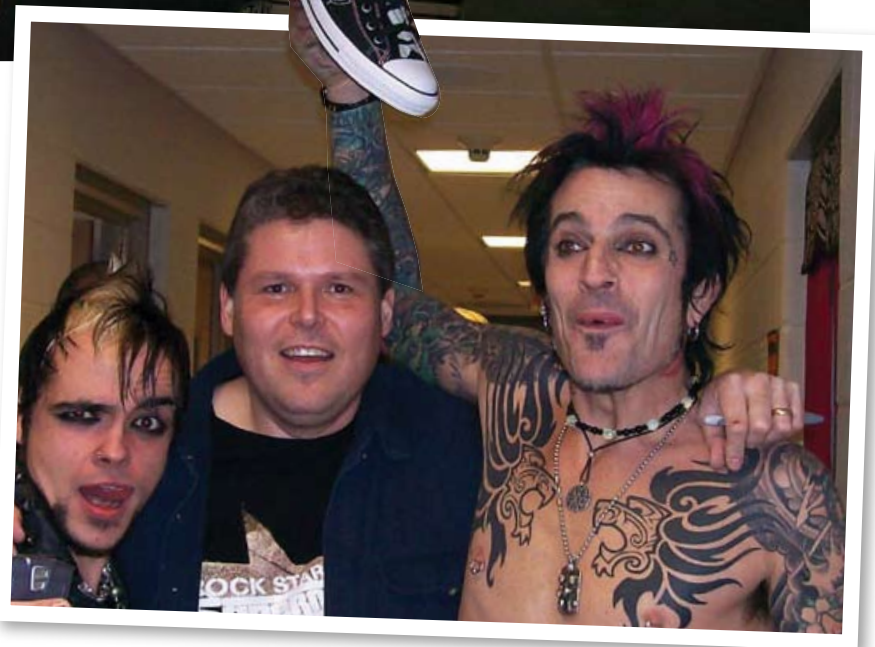
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Remember the school days of your jaded youth when putting your mark on everything, as in literally, with ink, was one way to pass the time? Well, one misguided youth from Manhattan grew up to make a career out of that. He goes by MAG, his old Graffiti tag, which might still be scribbled on an abandoned building somewhere in Washington Heights.

He is a custom sneaker artist, who uses high-quality paints to create miniature masterpieces on shoes: Chuck Taylors, Vans, and Nike Air Force Ones. His work has covered the twinkling toes of several celebrities, including Tommy Lee, Alexa Ray

Joel, Lukas Rossi, and Dr. Jefferey Wigand, the man behind the movie *The Insider*. MAG would like to get his kicks on a slew of other celebs, such as Van Halen, Def Leppard, Chris Daughtry, and Bruce Springsteen. At the rate he is painting, it is only a matter of time.

“My wife, Gina, and I started Punk Your Chucks about a year and half ago,” says MAG. “She saw someone wearing Chucks that they had scribbled on and thought that I could do better. She bought a pair and told me to paint on them. When I gave them back to her, painted, she freaked out – in a good way. When she auctioned them off online for more than \$150, we thought we might be on to something. Now when there are





a lot of orders, I may paint 50 plus hours a week.”

MAG and Gina added tote bags and denim jackets to their unorthodox canvas collection. Lately they have been brainstorming other surfaces such as leather biker jackets and pants. Early in the year they will add silver jewelry, t-shirts, stickers, and patches to their online store of free-hand-painted goods.

But MAG is not interested in diverging from fabric or paper products anytime soon.

“I thought about dabbling in tattoo art once, but if you mess up painting on a sneaker, you can paint over it, says MAG. “You mess up painting on a 350 lb. guy named Spike, you’re seeking plastic surgery.”

MAG is largely self-taught and never had a formal arts education. His mother, a school teacher in Harlem, dabbled in oil painting, and he picked up much of his skill from her. He also frequently ditched class to hang out at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“Not a lot of tourists know this, but their recommended admission price is optional, says MAG. “Since you can pay anything to get in there, for a kid like me it was like going to a theme park for a nickel.”

Perhaps because he is untrained or maybe because people do not always see themselves as they appear, the most challenging request for MAG is portraits.

“Although I used to turn them down, recently I’ve done a few that

have come out pretty good from what I’ve been told, says MAG”

Browsing the designs on his Web site proves that this is not an indication of kinks in his talent. Just check out the pair titled “3 Daughters” using Japanese characters, as well as “The Lorax,” and “The Lord of the Rings Shire.”

Tommy Lee liked his “Lion Tattoo” Chucks so much that he hooked MAG and Gina up with backstage passes, and regularly emailed MAG while on tour. Interesting side note: Tommy Lee dragged his Chucks behind his bus to roughen them up before wearing.

Even though MAG has one customer who displays his Chucks gallery-style, most people wear theirs. They are covered in a protective polyurethane because they are *meant* to be worn for years.

The thing about MAG’s success that he does not talk about is that on top of being a cool artist, he’s a cool guy. He treats every shoe he paints like it is going to a V.I.P., and he treats people the same. So don’t be surprised if you see a connection to him in the Converse commercials that may air during the January episodes of American Idol. I would not want to be killed for revealing too much here, but at least if he “offed” me, he would send me to the grave in a nice, punked-out pair of All Stars. 