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Haunted

Japanese Ghosts
Book and Art Show by Dave Fox

Japanese ghosts and demons have been floating through my world since I started tattooing. And even though Japanese art hasn't always been the focus of my tattoos, I've always been interested, dabbling here and there. When I realized that dabbling wasn't the way people understand and become versed at Japanese art, I did something unusual for me: I started reading. But I always wanted a book of their many different creatures, ghosts and demons with corresponding images. And I could never find anything so direct. So I made this book to try to create what I sought. In the end, though, what I came up with was my version of a some Japanese legends, which have been interpreted in thousands of different ways since their invent.

When I started this book, I wasn't sure exactly where I was going to take it. I just started researching Japanese creatures, trying to find cool, different looking ones than the common hannya or oni images we're accustomed to. Then I began painting them. I did them large (14"x20") and loose. I sketched them lightly and open, and used fast brushwork, detailing as I painted, instead of in the sketch. I colored them with open washes and lighter colors, in order to give somewhat of a ghostly effect. This was a deviation from my norm of drawing a detailed, finished sketch, and then slowly and anally painting a solid outline with thick, finished colors and lots of black shading. Although there ended up being things I would have changed in the drawings had I spent more time on the sketches, in the end I think the loose, fast sketching and brushwork helped me to get a more natural style in these paintings and to learn a lot about my own drawing.



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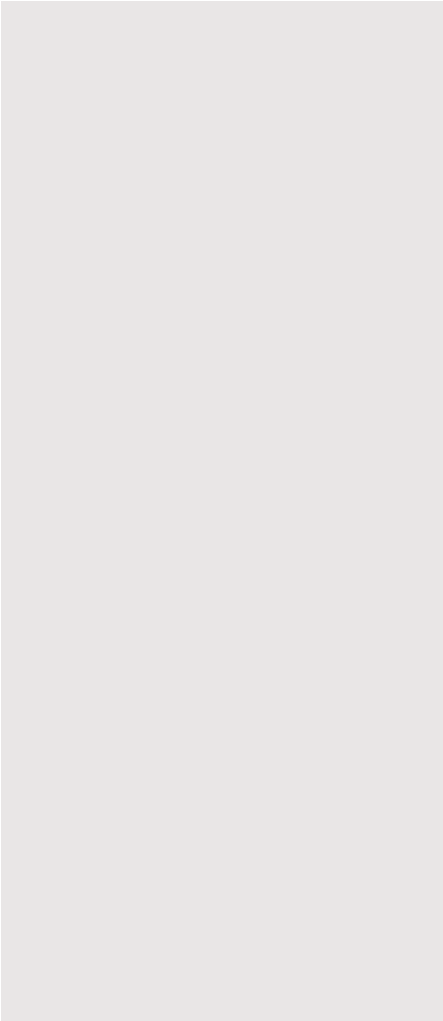
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With about 15-20 paintings finished, I started thinking more about how to present this compilation. I'd saved photos of the painted linework, incase I was going to do this as a photocopied sketchbook-type volume. I also considered turning it into a set of flash or prints. My goal in this project was to give more than just the basic set of flash images that tattooists have used throughout time. I wanted to make the guidebook that I always looked for, and to inform people at least a little bit about the images we've been seeing. So I called Brett Bryan at Pulse to ask his opinion. Luckily and thankfully he was hyped on the idea of doing a book. He funded the publishing and did the great layout which brought it all together in such a complete and finished volume.

In the end, I wanted to pay tribute to the Japanese print artists that influenced my work. In doing so, I was also trying to make it clear to other tattooers that this kind of artwork is not based on one or two artists. It's based on a tradition of many generations of different kinds of Japanese artists and art forms. I included paintings of the printmakers that had the greatest influence on me, Kuniyoshi, Kyosai, and Yoshitoshi (who's style I feel has been especially overlooked by tattooists). But I also gave thanks to the many tattooers who have helped to mold my style of Japanese art over the years. Horiyoshi isn't the only source for Japanese art, but nobody can deny his influence on us, either.





When it was all said and done, and the time came for the big opening, I came down with the flu. So the first time I got to see the body of work as a whole, I was in a feverish haze. Bring the crowd of onlookers and seekers of signatures at the book opening, and add several beers to the mix (to dull the effects of the cold, but increase the haze even more)- I'm sure more than one person ended up with some strange scribble of a monster in their book. But luckily everyone seemed to enjoy the opening that was held at my friend Mike's Jinxed Clothing store in Philadelphia (better with friends than at some hoity toity gallery). And I was excited to see it all come together and have everyone there to view the walls packed with paintings.

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