

Ground-breaking Tattooed Lexus UX Offers the Chance to “Ink Big”

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Fine craftsmanship and traditional Japanese artistry collided when Lexus commissioned the world's first tattooed car. Enlisting leading London tattoo artist Claudia De Sabe to design and create this one-of-a-kind art piece, the brand chose the UX compact SUV to be her canvas.

The all-white [2020 Lexus UX](#) offered the perfect backdrop for bringing to life De Sabe's vibrant ground-breaking design. Her first time tattooing something other than the human body, the Italian-born artist was up for the challenge of inking metal.

Operating a Dremel® tool instead of a fine tattooing needle, she etched a sweeping design featuring koi carp along the entire length of the vehicle. The koi is a familiar motif in traditional Japanese art, representing qualities of good fortune and perseverance. With a self-described aesthetic of "Western traditional meets Japanese," De Sabe is well-versed in the intricacies of koi, snakes and botanicals, while using her artist's eye to give them a modern feel.



Following a six-month timeline from concept to finished piece (actual tattooing took place over five eight-hour days), the project stands as a tribute to the Takumi craftsmanship applied to every Lexus. Lexus Takumi master craftsmen are a highly trained elite group of skilled experts who bring their precision to the car-making process. Qualifying as a Takumi takes more than 25 years of training. The Tattooed UX is a product of a similarly rare level of skill and handcraft.

To learn the story behind this feat of art, we caught up with De Sabe in her London studio to learn more about her inspiration, technique and “using the wave.”



What was your inspiration for the design?

My main inspiration for the design of the car was all the beautiful artwork that I've seen in Japan; in the temples, Ukiyo-e prints, all that artistic background. That also is very much translated and used in Japanese tattooing.

How long have you been a tattoo artist, and what inspired you to join the profession?

I've been a tattoo artist for 15 years professionally, 14 of which were in London. I learned the craft mostly from getting tattoos. You understand more once you go through the experience.

Obviously, there's a huge difference between tattooing the human body and a metal car. Please take us inside what it's like to work with (and artfully blur the lines between) such major distinctions?

When you tattoo somebody, you're mainly thinking about their body structure and how the muscles and tissues go onto the skeleton. I saw the car in exactly the same way. When you work on skin, there is a softness to it. Completely different when you're working with a Dremel® onto the car body. It is just metal on metal.



Did you seek any outside guidance or influence when conceptualizing the idea?

When I first developed the idea, my husband, who is Japanese and is a tattoo artist as well, was very much the perfect sounding board for me.

Can you describe the design and the marine themes used to bring it to life?

I used the natural wave that the koi would swim, and I made it so that the tail would end up wrapping up onto the roof, using that little bit on the back of the rear of the windows of the passengers' seats.

What were some of the techniques you used to tattoo the car — and to lend the design a sense of movement and dimensional depth?

I used a Dremel® to carve the paint off to reveal the metal of the body of the car as an outline, especially for the waves and the koi, because we liked the idea of scratching the car, but to do something beautiful. On top of that, we used car paint to fill in the koi design and the waves. Most of the design work is based on that, and we just used gold leaf to give a little bit of accents of light, and add a 3-D element to it, across the car.



What did you find to be the most challenging aspect of the design journey?

Making sure that the koi would fit with the natural design of the car was the hardest part about designing the vehicle.

What was the best aspect of tattooing the Lexus UX and why was this the most ideal vehicle for the project?

Everything from the lines on the side of the body, to the shape of the windows; everything is just so dynamic and beautiful. It was the perfect fit for the design and the concept itself.