



Known for his clean lines and intricate traditional designs, Mayo Landicho puts the finishing touches on client Hernan Topacio's half-sleeve.

VANCOUVER HOME TO TRADITIONAL TATTOOS

World-class tattoo artist Mayo Landicho has brought batok-style Filipino tattooing to Vancouver after studying under Kalinga elder Whang-Od in the mountains of the Philippines.

Stories and photos by Jessica Purver

BATOK STYLE UNIQUE TO BIRTHMARK TATTOOS

Mayo Landicho has mastered the art of balancing tradition with modernity. A tattoo artist with decades of experience under his belt, Landicho is known internationally for his beautiful Filipino-style and modern fusion tattoos. In Vancouver, he is one of the only craftsmen who practices traditional hand-tapping at his shop Birthmark Tattoos. Worldwide, he is one of the only artists to receive the blessing from the oldest living tattoo artist in the world, Whang-Od, to bring the tradition back home. In 2013, Landicho trekked over 17 hours from his hometown to reach the village of Kalinga in Buscalan, Philippines. After hearing about Whang-Od, now 97-years-old, he knew he had to meet her and learn the ancient technique of "batok" tribal tattoos. Previously, Landicho taught himself hand-tapping from books and through friends. "I stayed there for two days and a night, and tried to talk to her and learn everything about the [technique], the actual tools that she used," he said. "It's a thorn and she just used charcoal for ink." Landicho said after receiving his own tattoo from

the elder herself, Whang-Od passed him the tools to give him the same honour. Not only was his journey an experience to revisit his roots and connect physically with a respected artistic tradition, Landicho fulfilled a vision he had twenty years ago. "Back in the 90s I had a recurring dream, I had it every night, that I need to go to the northern part of the Philippines," he said. "I had to meet a girl." At the time, he had no clue what this dream meant. However, when he reached Whang-Od in her village, he said everything fell into place. "It was raining, and the sky just cleared out," he said. "It reminded me [...] I think this is my dream, I've seen this." Upon returning to Vancouver, Landicho designed a modern replica of the ancient tattooing tool that was compatible with the sterile, pre-packaged needles used in North America. Currently, Landicho has a waitlist of three to six months for hand-tapping tattoos. He said his artwork attracts clients from across the globe. "I do fusion, traditional - machine and hand-tapping," he said. "I'm always up for the creative challenge."



(Top left) Hernan Topacio's completed traditional Filipino-style half-sleeve on Dec. 3, 2016. (Top right) Cheryl Whiting's Asian-inspired modern flower tattoo, completed in 2013. (Bottom) Mayo Landicho chats with Hernan Topacio in the fifth hour of tattooing. Landicho free-handed the custom piece.



Mayo Landicho wraps up Hernan Topacio's completed bicep tattoo after their second session. After searching for the right tattoo artist for five years, Topacio sought out Landicho for his traditional and personal custom designs.

FIVE-YEAR SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT TATTOO ARTIST

For Hernan Topacio, getting tattooed is extremely personal. He said he searched for an artist who specialized in traditional Filipino tattoos for five years before coming across Mayo Landicho's website. From the images he saw online and from the glowing reviews across the city, Topacio had finally found the right tattoo artist. He said the piece he received was a culmination of his life experience, and also marked the milestone of turning 45 years old this year. "Essentially, it speaks to where I've come from, my original roots in the Philippines," he said. "I wanted to have something of my background built into it [...]"

Amongst other things, I wanted to just reflect who I am in the tattoo." Landicho created an intricate tribal design that stretched from the top Topacio's right shoulder to his elbow. "Twenty-one years as a police officer, ex-military, I've got two kids, married," Topacio said. "I kind of wanted to show some strength as a caregiver, just a protector and kind of warrior mentality." Landicho said he bases his custom designs on his customer's story, personality, social status and achievements. "Every single design is different and it fits the one

who's going to wear it," he said. "I usually do it that way because we're supposed to earn it. I try to give [...] the traditional pattern. You just go with the meaning." Topacio is planning to return for his second tattoo. Although Landicho produces pieces influenced by the Philippines, he said he found people in Vancouver to be more open-minded when it came to tattoos. "It just happened that here it's more accepted as an art form," he said. Even though there is a stigma around tattoos in the Philippines, the art has a long history in tribal communities. "Thousands and thousands of years," Landicho said. "It's been passed down from generation to generation."



(Top) The tattoo Mayo Landicho received on his right forearm from Kalinga elder Whang-Od in 2013. (Centre) Landicho demonstrates the traditional Filipino hand tapping technique on the tools he brought back from his visit with Whang-Od. (Bottom) Birthmark Tattoos on Main Street and King Edward Avenue attracts clientele from all over the world.

