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Exclusive Clip: Spike's "Ink Master" reaches 100

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In an era when tattoos have become so culturally acceptable, it's no wonder that Spike's **Ink Master** has reached the celebrated centennial milestone.

The tattoo competition series – which evolved out of a collaborative effort between Original Media and the Viacom-owned cable net and is now in its eighth season – places tattoo artists through a variety of challenges set to test their technical skills and on-the-spot creativity by executing an original tattoo on a “human canvas.”

Episodes focus on such styles of tattooing as realism, portrait, black and white, and American traditional, and culminate with contestants facing a panel of judges made up of series host Dave Navarro and world-renowned tattoo artists Chris Nunez and Oliver Peck.

“We immediately realized that it would skew more female than the stuff that had already been on the channel,” **Sharon Levy**, executive VP of original series at Spike, told realscreen ahead of the show's 100th episode, “so we decided to buy it as one of our first steps to becoming a general entertainment network.”

Since launching season one in 2012, the program **has spun out series Ink Master: Redemption** and has also released a number of standalone specials themed around upcoming holidays.

The series has managed to achieve longevity by evolving its creative and invigorating the format through minute alterations on a seasonal basis in an effort to engage its audience. Season seven, for instance, pulled in an average viewing audience of 1.8 million and triple-digit gains for adults 18-49 years (+252%), while season six averaged 2.4 million viewers – the highest tally in franchise history.

While there have been a variety of docuseries on television detailing the day-to-day exploits and activities of tattoo shops, Ink Master managed to separate itself from the crop by serving as one of the originators of tattooing as a competition series, alongside Oxygen's **Best Ink** and CMT's **Tattoo Titans**.



“What I also think sets Ink Master apart is the human canvases,” said executive producer Andrea Richter. “There’s that whole other element beyond the people who are competing that come in every week that you’re fascinated by, that change the game that none other can and are completely unpredictable.”

While that human element can set the series apart from reality competitions in the culinary space, for instance, it can also cultivate a variety of production challenges.

“You’re dealing with a creative community and that’s always challenging when your contestants are deeply passionate about the work they do,” said **Glenda Hersh**, president and co-CEO of Original Media. “They care fundamentally, and they have a lot of pride, history and reputation so it makes it even more challenging in terms of bringing them together in a group.”



Development on the series becomes more challenging when network execs like Levy turn up the heat on the production team by coming up with increasingly outrageous tests and canvases. If Spike thinks a head tattoo would be a great idea, Levy said, the team at Original Media has to go out and find a handful of people who want head tattoos.

“We’re always giving them these categories that we feel are uncastable, and yet they always deliver,” she added.

The competition from Original Media is slated to broadcast its 100th episode tonight (Oct. 11) at 10 p.m. ET/PT on Spike.

“These days it’s hard to get a show launched, it’s hard to get a show to reach a second season,” Hersh said “For this show to reach 100 episodes and still be as strong as our show is, it’s a real testament to the concept, the format, the producers, the network and the support of the show, which is really spectacular.”