



## Tat's Not All, Folks

Spike's competition series isn't slowing down in season eight

By PAULA HENDRICKSON

Few shows gain momentum as they age, but "Ink Master" isn't your typical reality competition series.

Season eight of Spike's "Ink Master," which will hit the 100-episode landmark, is improving on last year's ratings, its combined social media presence jumped 14% since 2015, and its fan base has broadened — women now make up 55% of the audience compared to 38% in season one. "Ink Master" was the right show at the right time for the right channel.

"I was in New York taking pitches, and met with Charlie Corwin, who at the time was running Original Media," recalls Sharon Levy, Spike's exec VP of original series programming and development. "He said, 'I've got this thing, but I don't know if it's right for you.' I said, 'Tell me about it.'"

"I've always loved tattoos

and I love art. I knew that traditionally those shows had a good female basis and we were trying to start the climb from a man's network to a broader channel. We were in our infant stages of that transition, so I said, 'Let's do it.' He said he could hopefully deliver Dave Navarro — we all thought that was a fabulous idea. Within two weeks he had packaged it all up."

Navarro, guitarist and founding member of Jane's Addiction, didn't know what to expect from his first TV competition hosting gig.

"Being an art collector and a fan of all the arts — and certainly a tattoo collector as well — it was something that was right in my wheelhouse," Navarro says. "I never really imagined it would become such a huge part of my life."

Navarro and renowned

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Dave Navarro

tattoo artists Oliver Peck and Chris Nunez have been the judges since season one.

"I think our show sets the standard for formatting how you critique a tattoo," Nunez says, noting how each challenge focuses on a different technique, giving judges parameters for making tough decisions.

"There are a lot of challenges that me and Chris would not want to have to do," Peck admits. "A lot of the artists don't know what they're getting into when they come onto the show. It's a lot harder than they thought. But any artist that's willing to go on a public forum and put themselves out there to be challenged and tested — it's pretty admirable."

Upping the ante? Human canvases.

"The stakes are genuinely high when somebody is literally risking their hide," Nunez says. "We let people know, 'This is what happens on the show. This is what's going to happen if you come on to be a human canvas. Are you willing to roll the dice?'"

They are.

"People come in for different reasons," says showrunner/exec producer Andrea Richter. "Maybe they have a tattoo idea they love, but haven't been able to get done because

### Illustrated Man

"Ink Master" contestants perform their challenges on human canvases with no room for error.

they can't afford it, or perhaps they're collectors who are like, 'I'll take the experience and give up my skin.' It's riveting to watch no matter what the stakes are and no matter what the person has come in to get. You're on the edge of your seat because it could turn out great, it could not turn out great. And yeah, they can't throw out the dish or wipe off the makeup [like on other shows]. It's there forever."

Unless, of course, they land a re-do on the show's spinoff, "Ink Master: Redemption," also starring Navarro, Peck, and Nunez.

Glenda Hersh was a fan of the show even before becoming co-president and co-CEO of Original Media in early 2015. "You just get drawn in. What I especially love is that it's constantly evolving. Every season the format is a little bit different. I was so excited to become a part of it. Nothing makes me happier than when Andrea says, 'OK, it's time for us to figure out the creative for next season.'"

From the start, competitors have been kept off bal-

ance with flash challenges forcing them to work in different media, such as gunpowder, salt, or even pig carcass.

"This season we decided to go with the theme 'Peck vs. Nunez,' and pitted our judges against each other in teams," says Tori Socha, Spike's VP of development. "The artists had no idea they'd actually be competing as teams — that threw them off because they came in with solo strategies in mind and ended up being on teams. Then they found out they'd be competing against each other within their teams, which threw them off again."

"All of the different twists we do every season create an unpredictable environment for both the audience and for us on set as well," Navarro says. "I've really got to hand it to our producer, Andrea Richter, who is an instrumental part of making the show retain that sense of unpredictability."

According to Levy, the show's live finales rank among Spike's all-time highest-rated live events. "Ink Master" is one of our most important franchises in channel history," Levy says. "For a competitive show to go into its eighth season and still go up is phenomenal." **W**