

The price of art? A piece of flesh

A number of Canadian artists are giving out their creations to people who tattoo their work onto their bodies

BY NADJA SAYEJ

Times may be tough this Christmas, but if you've got an art buff on your shopping list, here's one way to get a bargain – go out and get some ink.

If you have their artwork tattooed onto your body, a number of Canadian artists, flattered by your permanent commitment to their creation, will give you a piece of art in exchange.

Guy Bérubé, an Ottawa-based gallery owner, first found out about the tattoo-for-art trade in February through Toronto artist Daryl Vocat's website.

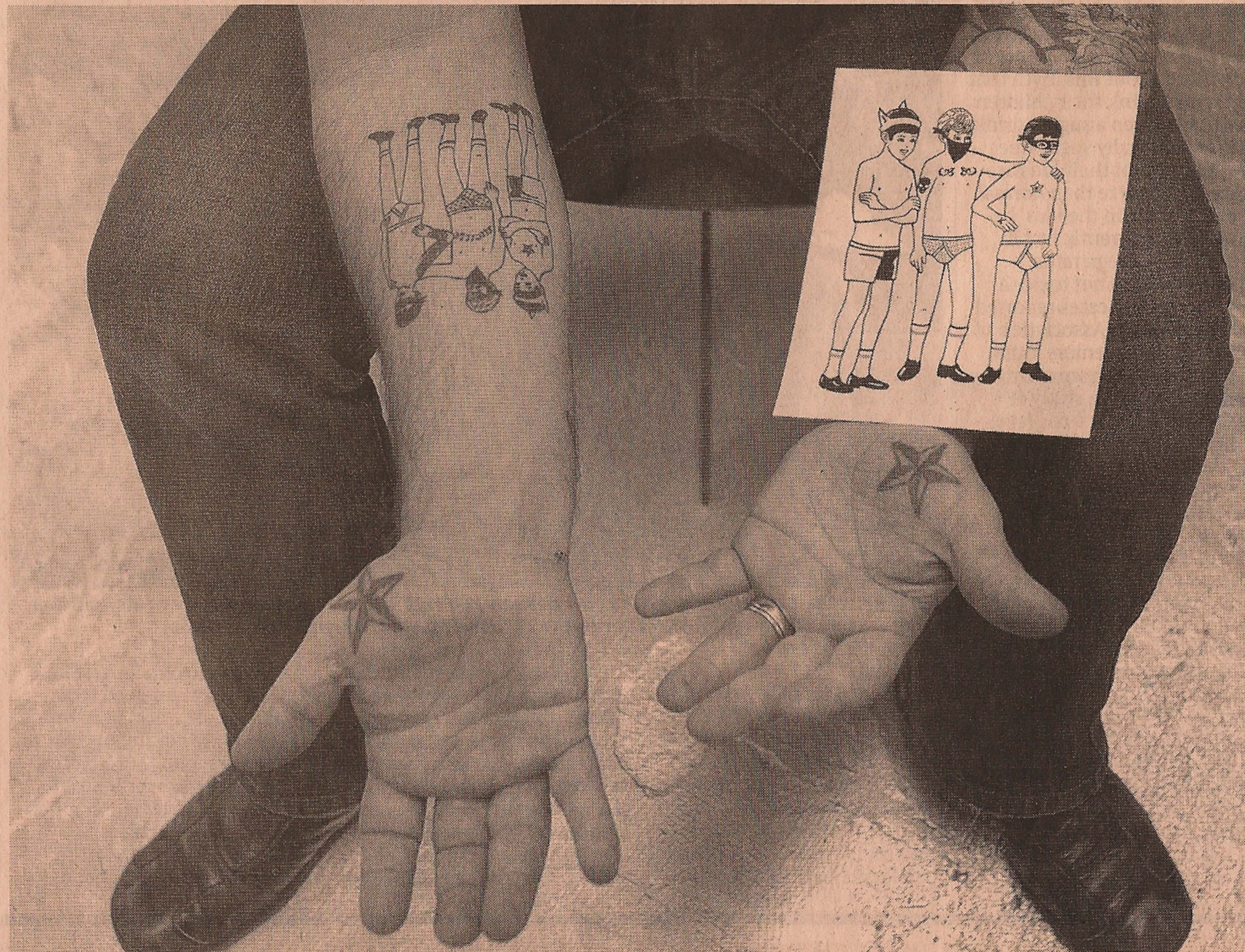
"Want art? Get a tattoo," wrote Mr. Vocat, explaining that he would mail a dozen screen prints of his drawings, worth \$120, to anyone willing to "prove it" with a snapshot.

Mr. Bérubé, 44, signed up and got a \$100 tattoo of a favourite illustration in June. "Everybody loves a deal," he said.

The image on Mr. Bérubé's forearm shows three cartoonish Boy Scouts posing together in their boxers and briefs. To him, it represents the relationship he has with his two brothers, Denis and André.

"I thought it was fascinating; I love the work," Mr. Bérubé said. "But I'm about getting the book with 12 cards in it."

While images by some high-profile Canadian artists such as Fiona Smyth, Kelly Mark and



Guy Bérubé's tattoo was designed by Toronto artist Daryl Vocat. In return, the artist gave him 12 prints. BILL GRIMSHAW FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

and got the folio with 12 prints in return.

While the star-struck art buff gets a free piece to hang on a wall, the artist also gets something in return: an ego boost.

"It's the ideal place to show art," said Mr. Vocat, who popped by and took snapshots while Mr. Bérubé was being tattooed this summer. "It's the most exciting thing that can happen to me as an artist."

To Toronto-based conceptual artist Micah Lexier, the tattoo-for-art trade is just an extension of the "standard" art-for-art trades that artists have been doing for ages. Whenever Mr. Lexier gives lectures at galleries, museums or universities, he always mentions he is game for the trade.

"It's about friendship. It's bartering; no money's exchanged and everyone gets what they want," said Mr. Lexier, 48. "One of the joys of it is that money isn't an issue at all."

But snagging a piece by Mr. Lexier through a tattoo trade could end up being an extremely sweet deal. According to his Toronto dealer, Robert Birch, who is next in line for a tattoo by Mr. Lexier, his screen prints start at \$500 and his steel wall sculptures go for \$15,000.

Clinton Draper, a 27-year-old dancer based in Victoria, B.C., claims he wasn't in it for the