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Does Chris Brown's tattoo depict a battered Rihanna?

By Zosia Bielski

The tattoo that's sprung from Chris Brown's neck is garnering the kind of attention the singer hasn't been able to coerce from the public since he beat Rihanna in his rented Lamborghini following the 2009 Grammy Awards

Is it Rihanna? Or a "random" battered woman?

The tattoo that's sprung from Chris Brown's neck is garnering the kind of attention the singer hasn't been able to coerce from the public since he beat Rihanna in his rented Lamborghini following the 2009 Grammy Awards.

The tattoo looks like a woman's face, bruised and sporting a black eye, as well as gashes or stitches running across the lips. While Brown's reps have denied the likeness is Rihanna ("It's a random woman," sources told TMZ) many have been quick to point out the resemblance between the ink job and the unsettling photograph of Rihanna's battered face, which surfaced after the attack.

Pundits and haters have been quick to ascribe meaning to the ill-advised neck tat. Is it the bragging of a convicted offender showing off "his handiwork," as one commenter wrote on Gawker? Or, as another put it, a scarlet letter that signifies his guilt? Is it a "fair warning label" to future romantic conquests? An increasingly desperate cry for help, or more attention-whoring of the Breezy variety? Or is it just the way Brown and RiRi communicate with each other? (She got several tiny guns tattooed on her body shortly after the assault.)

The consensus seems to be that the tattoo, like all of Brown's antics since the brutal attack three years ago, is emotional terrorism – if not upon her (Brown was reportedly sporting the tattoo when he kissed Rihanna at the the MTV Video Music Awards last week), then upon us, the unwitting audience.

"Brown doesn't appear to be reformed, remorseful, or even the slightest bit disturbed by the horrific nature of his actions. ... [He] wouldn't be the first batterer in history to be proud of the pain he has inflicted," Zerlina Maxwell blogged at Feministing.

"The intention of this is unclear but it's certainly not a campaign to assist a battered women's shelter," said Amanda Dale, executive director of the Barbra Schliker Commemorative Clinic, which serves women experiencing violence in Toronto.

"Let's say he was working with the White Ribbon campaign and saying, 'I admit: I hit a woman. No guy should hit a woman. I got this tattoo so I will never forget the bad moment in my life and I'm raising money for this cause.' We

might question the taste of it, but we'd respond differently."

Since no context is evident, the public assumes, "This is a man who has been convicted of assault and he appears to be wearing a badge about it," Dale said.

She noted that a pornographic element often enters into representations of abused women – evident with this tattoo, but also in the voracious circulation of Rihanna's post-assault close-up in 2009. "It's an easy enough image to exploit. There's a voyeurism involved in these moments of vulnerability to violence that is distressing."

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