

STYLE

Hidden ink

A tattoo tour of Yale.

// BY LILY SCHECKNER AND MADISEN FINCH

Walking around campus feels like traversing a Ralph Lauren ad. Whether it's the glossy blowouts, Longchamp purses or perfectly curated outfits, the theme seems to be elegant, understated and "old money." While there are some miniature exceptions — switching to wired earbuds or a tattered vintage Coach bag — the goal seems to be to conform in a cool way. To stand out but not draw unwanted attention. Even individuality must be aesthetically conventional. Despite the fact that getting tattoos or body modifications seems to be incredibly popular amongst our age group, we don't frequently see tattoos, colored hair or piercings anywhere else but on earlobes on Yale's campus.

After we both happened to get hip tattoos of animals last semester — separate, not matching! — we wondered where this culture on campus came from, and who was brave enough to fight against it. Why get a tattoo if it is incongruous with the "Yale aesthetic"? Why do students decide to show them off, or keep them hidden? What do these tattoos mean, if they mean anything at all?

Angelina Reno '28 explains that for her, the choice to get tattoos meant something, but she cared about making sure they weren't visible. She didn't want people to know she had them but felt like they were a way of expressing her dedication to her family. The tattoo behind her ear, the "Reno" on her ankle and the tattoos on her forearms are all easy to hide and don't stand out against the quiet elegance of the Yale campus.

Maya Koerber-Marx '29 offers another perspective. While Koerber-Marx's tattoos, including a Rooibos flower on her ankle commemorating her high school semester abroad, are relatively visible, she explained her original fears about getting a tattoo in the first place. As someone interested in going into

politics, she was worried that tattoos could make her seem unprofessional. She's not alone. This worry seems a prevalent one, especially for the pre-professional students that Yale attracts.

Regardless of this fear, however, Koerber-Marx said, "I am not going to let that dictate how I live my life." She currently has six tattoos, all somewhat visible.

For others, their tattoos are emblematic of life-altering, movie-worthy experiences — meant, in a way, to be seen and asked about. For Sophie Peetz '28, a small angel wing on her wrist is more than just an addition to her soft aesthetic or a matter of self expression.

"Basically, the summer after my freshman year of high school, I was involved in a lightning strike accident," Peetz told us. "Me and two other individuals were all struck by lightning. We were all unconscious. It was a huge ordeal. I was the first one to regain consciousness and I performed CPR on one of the victims and did intense first aid on the other — and they both made it."

The lightning strike took place at the Grand Canyon on the Bright Angel Trail. In the weeks that followed, one of the two other victims was in a coma. Her religious family took to calling Peetz — who helped save the girl's life — their "bright angel."

Peetz chose her left wrist for the angel tattoo, the side of her body that was affected by the electricity. She didn't feel any pain in the moment because the nerve damage was so severe, but later, she had to relearn how to walk and permanently lost hearing in her left ear, she said. Peetz wanted a constant reminder in the tattoo of not only what she had been through but that her survival is continuous.

"It's a reminder that anything can happen at any time," Peetz said, "and I feel like all of us always take for granted every single day, and I wanted a constant reminder of that."

Unlike Peetz's subtle tattoo, Max Chabries-Smith '28 and Orion Browne '28 have tattoos that are immediately obvious to passersby. Chabries-Smith's large fish tattoo spans the length of his forearm, curling up towards his elbow, while Browne's various tattoos — the number of which he struggles to pinpoint — are scattered across his forearm,

shoulder, bicep, chest and ribs.

For Chabries-Smith, his tattoo is inherently grounded in a place: the Great Lakes area of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was homesick during his first semester at Yale and went home for break, feeling an itch for something that would remind him of home when he returned to college.

"I was like, I want to get a tattoo to ground me, to connect me to home," Max Chabries-Smith explained to us. "What should it be?"

The answer was obvious. The North American lake trout is one of the most populous fish in Lake Michigan. For Max, the fish represent strength and rebirth. "It felt very symbolic almost, that sort of reattachment and rehabilitation of the species," Max said.

Browne's tattoos, much like their placements, are diverse: a snowflake on his ribs, an infinity symbol on his arm, a sun peeking through a forest on his shoulder. Each one represents a connection to a person in his life. The snowflake on Browne's ribs represents the impact of his long-term girlfriend, who he has dated now for over four years. The infinity symbol on his arm, intertwined with the words "be consistent," "be present," "be uncomfortable" and "be yourself," is a reminder of the four biggest lessons his mom has taught him, he said.

"The most meaningful is probably my shoulder one, it was for my little sister," Browne told us. "When she was born it was a huge moment in my life. Her name is 'sun' in French, and so I got woods and the sun shining through it — it was like her shining through all the struggles in my life."

Tattoos seem to serve as both ways to relive moments and express oneself. While many of the tattooed Yalies point to purity culture — as Peetz said, "It's a matter of wanting women to look pure and untouched, and I think that's ridiculous" — or concerns about their future professional careers as reasons why one might be apprehensive about tattoos, there is consistent intentionality behind each of their choices to rebel. Why and where people get tattoos is not a youthful indiscretion but a thoughtful decision — one that will last long after we leave these ivy-covered walls.

Contact **LILY SCHECKNER** at lily.scheckner@yale.edu and **MADISEN FINCH** at madisen.finch@yale.edu.



PERSONAL ESSAY

The piggy bank has shattered

// BY ESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ

Money, money, money. I'm not talking about an ABBA song. Money plays a big role in every college student's day-to-day life. Whether you're a frugal minimalist or the top Shein consumer in America, thinking about your finances is unavoidable.

As a broke college student, I long for the days when I could justify dropping over \$100 to get my nails done. For now, glue-on nails are good enough. Eating food outside of the dining halls has become a source of financial guilt. Even thrifting has been rebranded as "curated vintage." I am giving influencing, TikTok-ing and Yale daily vlogging a go as a side gig. People spend hours to find dupes for the Free People We The Free Emerson Tote Bag that is already a dupe for the Balenciaga City Bag. Identifying "recession indicators" has become an online trend and joke. It seems like a coping mechanism, but I am not certified to diagnose.

But as time goes on, the broke college student aesthetic is becoming less of a funny joke and more of a serious indicator of the current political and social disquietude. Anxiety is inescapable — probably because paying for therapy

is equally burdening. I can't even escape to TikTok or Instagram reels without running into financial tips and budget plans for 2026.

As a New Yorker article posited last April, what started as an internet punchline has begun to gesture towards "a collective psychological state." I agree that financial stress has seeped into all aspects of day-to-day life, especially as a college student. Even the humanities, a historically sacred bulwark of thought and expression, seems to be filled with students more likely to sell out to some artificial intelligence startup or investment bank than pursue their passions. Jokes aside, it has become apparent that pursuing a passion is either a sign of privilege or simply a bad financial plan.

Like many students, I hope to study abroad this summer. But this past semester, Yale combined the previously independent International Study and Summer Experience Awards into a single grant. This policy has created a difficult choice between pursuing educational passions or career stability. The price of education is a barrier that many are unable

to overcome, forcing them to sacrifice their academic interests over their future.

But despite all these pressures, there are ways to combat financial stress. Having open and honest conversations about money with your friends can be one way to set up realistic expectations. Personally, I'm always willing to swipe the credit card at Atticus, but I try to recognize how the costs of nights out and off-campus coffee runs add up quickly.

Learning to maximize all of Yale's resources has been pivotal to helping me lower my monthly expenses. I don't need to own every book I read and I don't really need to buy new clothes — except when there's a sale, that is. Yale has a lot of free events that can be fun to attend. Visits to Yale's museums can be a cute date idea. Replacing my daily matcha with water once or twice a week can save me around \$10. Ten dollars a week is \$40 a month and soon enough I have enough to buy a flight ticket back home. Maybe I don't need the matcha lattes after all. But my personal reality is different from that of others, a difference that makes finances hard to talk about. A lot of the financial stress people experience stems

from not having the money to meet their needs and means of survival.

Here at Yale, our peers might be the next politicians, and — if the amount I hear about coffee chats is any indication — they are definitely the next bankers. But just because we live in a community rooted in a history of wealth does not mean that we can turn a blind eye towards the fact that low-income students are the ones most affected by our economic reality. Although I stand by my earlier advice to "maximize all of Yale's resources," one of these days we are all, hopefully, going to graduate. If these humorous "recession indicators" turn real, many Yale graduates won't be able to scrimp and save their way out of financial anxiety. Acknowledging the economic implications of the current system is crucial.

Losing faith in the current economy, housing and job market is a serious issue, even if online jokes help make light of the situation. But it's not a joke. It is that serious.

Contact **ESMERALDA VASQUEZ-FERNANDEZ** at esmeralda.vasquez-fernandez@yale.edu.