

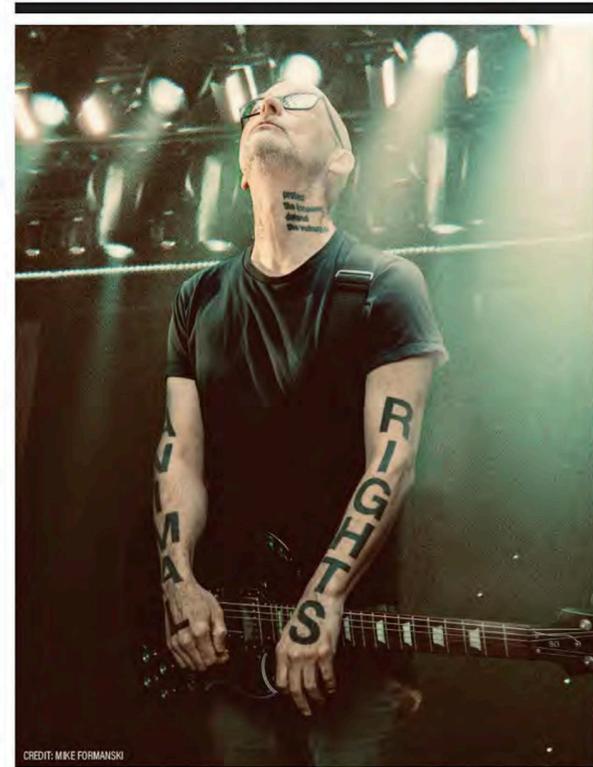
THE TATTOOED PUNK ROCK VEGAN

It's the early 90s in New York City. Moby is a DJ on the come-up, with one foot in the rave scene and the other in the punk rock community, where he has joined a socially conscious movement to forgo animal-sourced products. For a "20-something" living in the middle of the most congested city in America, a motley mix of nightlife, veganism, animal rights, and music with a message is becoming the foundational soundboard for his anti-establishment point of view as a creator. In time, the synthesis would inspire the raging subject matter behind his 1996 album *Animal Rights*, his only punk rock LP as a solo artist, and the melodic track list from his 1999 electronica follow-up album *Play*.

Nearly 25 years later, Moby has stayed true to his nonconforming form. The multiple-time Grammy Awards nominee remains unafraid to try new things that challenge societal and political boundaries with artistic expression. The large "Animal" and "Rights" tattoos that cover his forearms offer a bold glimpse into one of the many non-profit causes he has been committed to for decades. From the charity sales of his entire vinyl record collection and the well-known Mott Street apartment where he made the music for *Play* to orchestrating a 25th-anniversary tour in support of the celebrated classic — all of Moby's philanthropic pursuits are in the name of a singular goal that has been a part of his internal composition since he was a kid.

MOBY'S CANVAS AND MORAL CODE ARE DRAWN BY PASSION AND PRINCIPLES.

BY MIGUEL COSTA
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CREDIT: MIKE FORMANSKI

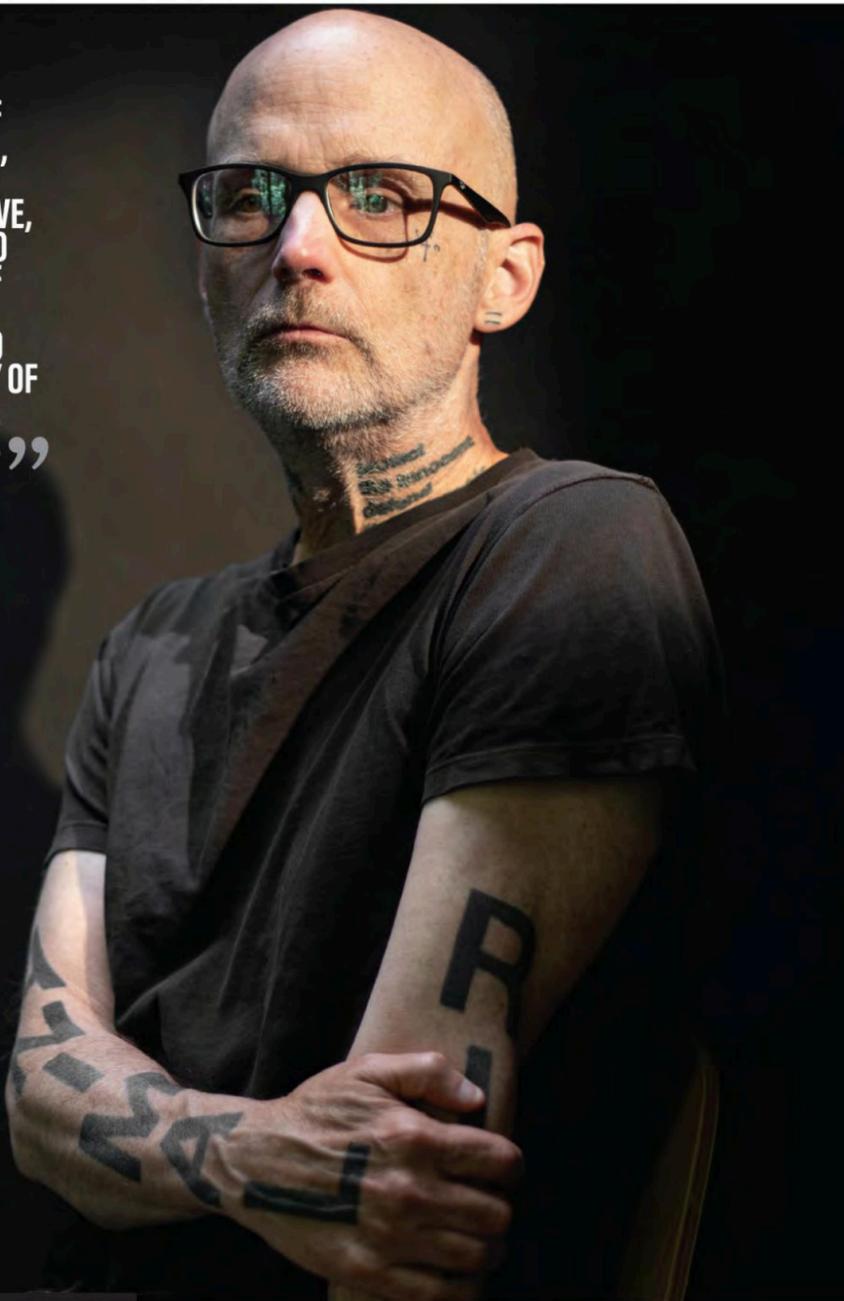
"I was raised by hippies," Moby recalled, "From an early age, I just knew that the only good use of resources is trying to make the world a better place. That was just instilled in me by my parents and the culture I grew up in. It just made me think, 'OK, the goal is to make things better, then punk rock came along and said, 'Yes, the goal is to make things better, but as dynamically as possible.' The straight-edge thing was like, 'We're not going to make things better by sitting around and smoking pot, we need to get out there and actually change things.' That really inspired me. My DNA was encoded in progressive activism."

Moby's boyhood vow to take action with compassionate initiatives led him to expand his brand with a fascinating excursion into the world of cinematography. In 2021, he launched an activism-centric film production company called "Little Walnut Productions," alongside his friend and fellow vegan, Lindsay Hicks, who serves as the Head of TV/Film. Lately, Moby's keen inclination to make art that

connects to humane practices appears to have influenced his physical appearance almost as much as his creative output.

Moby is pretty tatted up these days. In addition to the eye-catching designs on his arms, Moby has a growing collection of tiny face tattoos. This is an interesting development, considering how turned off he was the first time he encountered an individual with noticeable ink on his mug during the 1980s. On the upper right-hand side of Moby's temporal bone, the letter "V" sits on top of an "X," reflecting his devotion to living a vegan and straight-edge lifestyle. Meanwhile, the sentimental message on his left cheekbone depicts a small cross with the acronym LRSC (love, reason, service, and compassion). Like the ink on his arms, most of the tattoos in Moby's facial region, along with the "Vegan for Life" tattoo on the right side of his neck, were completed by the renowned Kat Von D at High Voltage Tattoo Studio in November 2019. The following year, upon paying a visit to Dan Smith, Von D's former castmate from the "L.A. Ink" TV series, he added one more candid message to his

“THE LIFE OF AN ANIMAL, FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, IS EQUAL TO THE LIFE OF A HUMAN. THERE'S NO HIERARCHY OF EXISTENCE.”



upper body. Moby walked out of Dan Smith's Captured Tattoo Studio, inked up on the left side of his neck with words that say, "Protect the innocent. Defend the vulnerable."

Four years later, another SoCal-based artist named Asia Rain added a light touch to the overall theme of Moby's tattoo collection by obliging an unplanned request for a small but meaningful symbol. "My friend Asia has a vegan store in L.A. called Besties [Vegan Paradise] and a vegan tattoo shop above that," Moby recalled. "So, I was hanging out there and said, 'I really want something,' but I didn't know what to get. So, I got a quick equality sign on my earlobe, meaning, in my mind, life is equal to life. The life of an animal, from my perspective, is equal to the life of a human. There's no hierarchy of existence. It might be a controversial belief, but that is the core belief of my belief system."

Vegan artists completed all of the previously mentioned tattoos. Moby is undecided on what will be added the next time an artist grazes his skin with their tattoo needles. However, when an inking for more arises, it's unlikely that he will emerge from a tattoo shop with elaborate designs or colorful gap fillers like many of his associates in the entertainment industry.

"I definitely want to get more, but I don't really want to get tattoos that people can't

see," Moby explained. "In my case, I've run out of visible real estate, and I'm just trying to figure out how to use the remaining [space] that I have effectively... I love other people's decorative tattoos; I love their artistic tattoos, but for me, all I've pretty much ever wanted are simple symbols and letters. The friends of mine who have colors, patterns, and images, it's beautiful for them. I guess it's kind of like going to someone's house. I love it when someone paints their walls an interesting color, but in my house, the walls are just plain because I'm kind of simple."

For Moby, the bond between vegans, the punk scene, and tattoos is a personal correlation that is far from simple. It dates back to his late teens in New York City when recognizable advocates of veganism, like John Joseph, former lead singer of the Cro-Mags, started getting inked by local artists. The number of tattooed rock stars that Moby assembled as interviewees for his 2023 film "Punk Rock Vegan Movie" illustrates the connection quite well in several scenes. The rockumentary dives into the origin and deep-rooted connection of veganism in the punk scene with personal testimonies from legends like Doyle of the Misfits and the late D.H. Pelligro of the Dead Kennedys.

The project also includes Q&A sequences with straight-edge vegans like Von D, Davey

Havok of AFL, Tim McIlrath from Rise Against, Andy Hurley of Fall Out Boy, and more. It also features the occasional usage of stop-animation. The cartoon portions in the documentary were one of many self-taught components that Moby, Hicks, and Jonathan Nesvadba, his music director, bass player, studio assistant, and photography assistant, implemented into their DIY production. Filming took place during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In a recent interview with *Inked Magazine*, Moby explained why he and his team chose the low-budget route to make the film.

"I knew from the beginning of making it that we were going to give it away — that was the goal, it was always going to be for free," Moby said. "So, to that end, I knew that I didn't want to make it expensive because if it had been expensive, it would not have been in keeping with the DIY aspect of punk rock and animal rights activism. [Another] reason we wanted to make it ourselves and make it not overly pricey is because it's fun to make things."

Initially, Little Walnut Productions primarily focused on subsidizing documentaries created by up-and-coming moviemakers. But, in the Summer of 2024, Moby and Hicks added a feature film to the company's cinematic repertoire for the first time when they wrapped "Tecie," a romantic story starring Mena Massoud and Sarah Jeffery. The film is set in Los Angeles, and Moby's history as an activist was a source of inspiration when he wrote the screenplay, a film that he describes as "Our first attempt at a scripted animal rights narrative." While an official release date has yet to be determined, Moby remains optimistic that "Tecie" will be available to moviegoers sometime in 2025.

Around the same time Moby and his team completed filming "Tecie," he pivoted back to his music career and dropped a new album called "Always Centered at Night" in June 2024. With a wide-ranging mix of trip-hop, electronic, and dance music, the 22nd studio album by Moby is somewhat of a throwback to his early work on "Play." The music includes contributions from an array of soul singers like Serpentinewithfeet, José James, and Choklate. The latter joined Moby for a seven-city tour throughout Europe to celebrate the 25th anniversary of "Play," during the third week of September 2024. All of the proceeds went to 14 charitable foundations based in Europe.

It's been a great ride so far. The 22-year-old version of Moby, who once rescued a kitten, that he later named Tucker, from a dumpster, would be pleased with the decades of work that transpired in the aftermath. Nearly 700 live shows, 20 million albums, and three face tattoos later, Moby's proactive deeds are growing just as steadily as any of his ventures in the entertainment industry. Thus, there may come a time when he finds himself without enough room on his body for visible ink to emphasize the causes nearest to his heart. By then, perhaps his longstanding mission will be complete.