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Master of Arts in:
Art History

It is entitled:
The Art of Tattooing: A Comparative Analysis of Japanese and American Tattoos

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The Art of Tattooing:  
A Comparative Analysis of Japanese and American Tattoos

A thesis submitted to the
Division of Research and Advanced Studies
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Art History
of the School of Art
of the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning

2008

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B.A., University of Colorado, Boulder, 2006

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Abstract

Tattoos are not a traditional topic of study for art historians but the growing popularity of this body art merits scholarly discussion. Traditional Japanese body-suit tattoos and contemporary American tattoos have grown from long and rich histories into a contemporary community of thousands of artists. In the first chapter I will discuss the history of Japanese tattooing and its iconography. The second chapter will contain a history of American tattooing. This chapter will also discuss different styles of American tattoos, which differ in both subject matter and technique. Finally, in the third chapter I will include a comparative analysis of the Japanese and American traditions. I will discuss master artists, training methods for artists, the relationship between Japanese printmaking and tattooing, and new innovations in contemporary tattooing. A comparative analysis of Japanese and American tattooing from an art historical perspective can broaden the breadth of art historical research and study.
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Introduction

For thousands of years people all over the globe have been injecting ink into their skin to create designs both intricate and simple. Ancient Egyptian mummies are sometimes found with adorned skin and the Maori people of New Zealand are renowned for their intricate facial tattoos even today. Many cultures incorporate abstract designs and patterns into their tattoos, but the Japanese and American traditions innovated the use of figural imagery and intricate color in tattoos. These two traditions are the most widely practiced tattooing traditions in the world and they are the most innovative. Also, American and Japanese tattoos are intricately linked. The American tradition has been greatly influenced by Japanese tattooing, and Japan has embraced American tattooing instruments in some instances. Artists from each country also collaborate frequently on tattoo designs and share their knowledge of the art with one another.

Modern society refers to tattooing as “body art,” yet few people would actually consider a tattoo to be something worthy of the term “art.” This is largely due to the stigma of deviance that tattoos carry in some communities. It is considered a practice for outside members of society and certainly not to be included in serious scholarly discussion. The negative connotations of tattooing are not only due to its criminal associations, but also its relationship with biopolitics. Giorgio Agamben addresses biopolitics in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and explains that the domination of state governments over bare life is what defines the world’s entrance into modernity. Totalitarian sates, like Nazi Germany, exercised this power to its full extent
when they defined which lives were worthy to be lived.\textsuperscript{1} They disposed of so-called unworthy life in concentration camps and branded the occupants with numbers tattooed on their arms. Branding also occurred among slaves in the American south and the Caribbean. This served not only as a means of tracking prisoners and slaves, but it also dehumanized them. They became more like animals than human beings. Thus this concept of branding leaves many with an extremely negative regard for tattooing.

However, it is my opinion that a tattoo may indeed be a work of fine art that is worth study and even public display. In my thesis, I will explore the attributes and history of tattooing in Japan and the United States, which have long cultural histories and continue to grow in popularity today. The tattooing tradition of Japan is especially well suited for this discussion given its close association with printmaking. In the United States tattooing is becoming more prevalent, and the emerging popularity of the art form has spurred the practice to new heights. I will also examine the differing techniques in both traditions. Through my research I will construct a comparative analysis of Japanese and American tattoos and bring an art historical perspective to the study of the art. I will argue that tattooing is a legitimate art form that deserves a place in scholarly discussion.

My first chapter will be an overview of the history of Japanese tattoo, \textit{horimono} in Japanese, and the iconography involved in that body of work. The Japanese have been tattooing for thousands of years. People from the periphery of Japan, namely the \textit{Ainu} in the north and the \textit{Okinawans} in the south, have a long tradition of tattooing their hands and feet.\textsuperscript{2} The earliest literary mention of Japanese tattoos comes from an ancient

Chinese manuscript that describes the Japanese with decorated bodies.³ Such tattoos were simple lines and dots that were used to mark criminals, but as time progressed these patterns became more and more elaborate.⁴ Tattoos reached the peak of their popularity in the eighteenth century when printmaking was also extremely popular. The tools and techniques for tattooing and printmaking share many of the same terms.⁵ Tattooing was an art of the lower classes, a topic I will discuss in further detail, and firefighters were among the first to wear horimono. The firefighter in Edo era Japan (1605 – 1868) was an outcast from society. They were typically ruffians. However, they were also admired for their bravery and contribution to society.⁶ Thus, the horimono took on the look of a firefighter’s full body suit. Throughout time the horimono developed a complex set of iconographical images. For example, the Japanese carp, koi, presents its wearer as brave, steadfast, and stoic. Today artists maintain the traditional methods of tattooing. A true horimono is still made by hand and uses the established iconography. The horimono is also a mark of the yakuza, the Japanese mafia, and I will also discuss this phenomenon in greater detail shortly.

My second chapter will concern the American tattooing tradition. In this chapter, I will explore the social implications of being tattooed in America as well as some typical iconography and imagery in contemporary tattooing. Like many other American traditions, tattooing in America has taken on the attributes of several cultures. During the World Wars many soldiers, especially U.S. sailors, returned from war with tattoos. The

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⁴ Richie and Buruma, 4.
⁶ Richie and Buruma, 26.
designs usually represented courage, patriotism, defiance of death, and longing for home. For many decades, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, a person with a tattoo was a rebel, and a tattooed person was often feared. They were especially popular with motorcyclists, and gangs like the Hell’s Angels roamed the country’s highways frightening most of the population. However, in the past thirty years tattooing has experienced a sort of revolution. A tattoo is no longer a sign of an ex-convict or a biker; now people from all levels of society are tattooed. It has become a mainstream activity. One needs only to turn on the television to see entire programs dedicated to tattooing. I will explore why such a change occurred and how it has impacted the perception of tattoos in American culture.

My third chapter is a comparative analysis of the two traditions. I will start by discussing the art of specific artists, namely Horiyoshi III in Japan and Don Ed Hardy in America. I will also explore what it means to be tattooed in Japan and the United States today. This chapter will include a discussion of the training of both Japanese and American tattoo artists. I will also use this chapter to discuss the unique qualities of Japanese tattoos and how they have influenced the American tradition. Additionally, this chapter discusses in detail the relationship between Japanese tattooing and printmaking. The two often shared the same imagery. Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s (1797 – 1861) prints frequently depicted tattooed people, especially the characters from the Chinese novel the Suikoden (first printed in Japan in 1757). It is this close relationship with printmaking that will contribute to my argument for the artistic merits of tattooing. I will not,

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8 Atkinson, 62.
9 Poysden and Bratt, 134-136.
however, discuss prison tattoos. Their creation is in an entirely different world than most
tattoos and their study could be a thesis all their own. My discussion will include tattoos
attained from trained practitioners in parlors or studios. Prison tattoos are usually made
by amateurs and possess an iconography separate from that in the mainstream tattoo
society.

Tattoos are not a typical subject of study for an art historian, and that is exactly
what drew me to this topic. However, there are many authors outside of art history that
have dedicated themselves to the study of tattoos. I will incorporate the work of art
historians and art historical theory when analyzing the actual content of tattoos. This will
be especially apt with *horimono*. In particular, Erwin Panofsky’s work with iconology
will be an invaluable tool as his principles can be applied to this art form as well.
However, I am going to have to branch out into other disciplines in order to provide a
comprehensive understanding of tattoos. For instance, my thesis will rely on sociology
since tattooing is frequently considered an act that is defined along class lines. Michael
Atkinson’s work *Tattooed: A Sociogenesis of a Body Art* has been especially useful in
my research. His work analyzes tattoos as a cultural and social activity. *Bodies of
Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* by Margo DeMello is a
book that contains a history of tattooing in America as well as discussion of the state of
tattooing today. DeMello is an independent scholar and tattoo historian and her book is
the quintessential source on the history of American tattooing.

This study of tattooing hopes to introduce a new medium into art history.
Tattooing is considered a viable topic of study in many disciplines, but not art history. In
my exploration of Japanese and American tattoos I will argue on behalf of their aesthetic
validity. The decoration of a body is just as valuable as the decoration of a canvas. The collaboration between client and artist is especially unique with tattooing since the client is not just choosing a painting to hang on the wall, they will actually wear the work of art for the rest of their lives. By comparing the state of tattooing in contemporary Japan and America and looking at specific artists at the peak of their trade I will demonstrate that it truly is a legitimate art form and one worthy of further study.
Chapter 1
The History and Iconography of Japanese Tattoos

For centuries the Japanese people have practiced the art of tattooing. The first mention of tattoos in Japan comes from a third-century Chinese manuscript called the *Wei Chih*. The Japanese, called the *Wa*, are described as follows: “…men, young and old, all tattoo their faces and decorate their bodies with designs.”¹⁰ In medieval Japan (the twelfth century – the sixteenth century) tattoos were punishments for heinous crimes. As time progressed tattoos were used less frequently as punishment and by the Edo period (1605 – 1818) they were prized for their physical beauty, but this was an art form only for certain members of society. The elite in the Edo period, such as samurai and courtiers, were never tattooed as tattooing never rid itself of a certain ignominious stigma. In modern Japan most people associate tattoos with the Japanese mafia, the *yakuza*, since most of their members wear full-body tattoos. However, the traditional Japanese tattoo is far more than a rite of passage for the criminal underworld. *Horimono* are a legitimate and traditional art form and worthy of the same attention received by other popular art like the prints of the Edo period known as *ukiyo-e*.

There are two terms used for traditional Japanese tattooing: *irezumi* and *horimono*. Literally, *irezumi* breaks down into two words: *ire* meaning “to insert” and *sumi* “ink.” *Horimono* is based on the word *horu* meaning “to engrave, puncture, or incise.”¹¹ The word is also associated with woodcarving, sculpture, and carpentry, thus

¹⁰ McCallum, 114.
making the connotation far more artistic. *Irezumi* is closely linked with the idea of using tattoos as punishment, and the word still carries this negative connotation. *Horimono* is the term used by tattoo masters, and frequently their professional names will include the word *horu*, like Horiyoshi.

The first tattoos in Japan were decorative. As mentioned above, ancient Chinese manuscripts describe the Japanese with designs on their bodies. However, in the *Nihonshoki*, a history of Japan completed in 720 AD, tattoos were associated with savagery and barbarism as it was practiced by those on the periphery of Japan. The Ainu and the Okinawans practiced tattooing on their hands and feet. Among the Ainu it was mostly the women who were tattooed. They usually tattooed their arms and feet, but always marked their lips.\(^\text{12}\) It was believed that without tattooed lips a woman would be damned. On mainland Japan tattooing was a form of punishment until its abolishment in 1870. Tattooing was reserved for especially heinous crimes, and once tattooed the criminal could never reintegrate himself into society. Murder, treason, and betrayal were all crimes worthy of tattooing. Punitive tattoos consisted of a line or a series of lines depending on the severity of the crime (fig. 1).\(^\text{13}\)

In the seventeenth century non-representational tattoos became popular among priests and prostitutes, from streetwalkers to high-class courtesans.\(^\text{14}\) These tattoos represented a pledge taken by the wearer. For a priest the pledge would be a prayer or a religious text. The tattoos were slightly more complicated for prostitutes.\(^\text{15}\) Their tattoos were pledges to their favorite lover. Often they were elongated to represent the

\(^{12}\) McCallum, 116-117.
\(^{13}\) Hendry, 23.
\(^{14}\) Richie and Buruma, 14.
\(^{15}\) Poysden and Bratt, 125.
endurance of their pledge. Sometimes they were even a series of dots above her left elbow, one dot to represent each year of her lover’s age.\textsuperscript{16} Many times the lovers of these prostitutes would also be tattooed. The tattoos were usually on the back of the arms, but tattoos on the inner thigh are also mentioned by Richie and Buruma. Obviously these tattoos were highly erotic and were called \textit{irebokuro} (\textit{ire} meaning “to insert” and \textit{bokuro} meaning “mole” or “beauty mark”).\textsuperscript{17} The ruling power at the time was a family of hereditary rulers known as the Tokugawa shogunate; throughout their feudal ruling era they implemented sumptuary laws that extended even to multiple bans of \textit{irebokuro}.

The ban on the tattoos of prostitutes was the first of many bans on tattoos by the Tokugawa. The Tokugawa government frequently placed bans on expressions of individuality.\textsuperscript{18} Tattoos were also a problem because they glorified something that was supposed to be a punishment and they were a form of individual expression. They also placed bans on the very popular Kabuki theater and fancy clothing. The ban on \textit{irebokuro} caused a long hiatus in the history of tattooing in Japan, but in the mid-eighteenth century there was a surge of interest in tattooing.\textsuperscript{19} It is unclear why this happened. The most likely cause for the renewed interest in tattoos was that they offered people a way to resist the Tokugawa sumptuary laws yet to do so unnoticed. Many people wore elaborate patterns on the inside lining of their kimono to get around the laws, so others decided just to decorate their skin.\textsuperscript{20} Since tattoos went unnoticed in public they were a form of private rebellion. Their invisibility kept their wearer safe from punishment.

\textsuperscript{16} Richie and Buruma, 15.
\textsuperscript{17} McCallum, 121.
\textsuperscript{18} Richie and Buruma, 16.
\textsuperscript{19} McCallum, 119.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
The most popular tattoos were based on a Chinese classic called the *Suikoden*. The story was about a group of bandits who roamed the Chinese countryside.\(^{21}\) It was very similar to the English “Robin Hood.” Like Robin Hood, the characters of the *Suikoden* represented the ideal of the noble bandit. The characters regularly rebelled against authority yet they also lived by their own code of honor, and they were tattooed themselves.\(^{22}\) By relegating the tales to folklore and art they became a safe, quiet form of mutiny without actual perfidy. Many woodblock printers made illustrations of this tale. The most popular were by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), and his prints were frequently the basis for tattoos in the Edo period and still are to this day (fig. 2).\(^{23}\) The tattoos in Edo period Japan were very closely associated with the popular *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. The two arts shared many of the same themes and designs as well as many of the same technical terms in the production of the art.\(^{24}\)

In eighteenth-century Edo tattoos were very popular, but only with the lower classes. Edo firefighters were instrumental in popularizing tattoos. The firefighters were ruffians hired by the government to put out fires. In a city constructed entirely of wood they were an extremely valuable resource.\(^{25}\) These men were feared for their ferocity yet also respected for their bravery. Frequently they were tattooed with symbols associated with their group; these symbols were always associated with water. The modern full body tattoo is actually based on the padded suits firefighter wore to protect their skin.\(^{26}\)

Firefighter tattoos eventually became popular with many types of service class people as

\(^{21}\) Richie and Buruma, 20.
\(^{22}\) Poysden and Bratt, 131.
\(^{24}\) Kitamura and Kitamura, 19.
\(^{25}\) Hendry, 25.
\(^{26}\) Richie and Buruma, 26.
well, like palanquin bearers, construction workers, and many artisans. However, they were regarded as a social anomaly. In Tokugawa Edo, the strict feudal system based on Confucian ideals consisted of a social hierarchy, which placed the samurai at the top followed by peasants, artisans, and finally merchants. However, the merchants were often some of the wealthiest members of society and were subject to sumptuary laws. Thus the lower classes, including laborers and artisans, were always under suspicion by the ruling class. Tattoos were considered a lower class oddity and curiosity, much like Kabuki. It became en vogue for women to have tattooed lovers. Since only the lower classes would ever be tattooed it was especially clandestine.\(^{27}\) In 1853 Japan was opened to trade with the West after two centuries of an official isolationist policy in which only the Dutch and Chinese were allowed even limited access to the country. Once Yokohama port was opened to foreigners the government set out to modernize and Westernize the country through the Tempo Reforms (1841-1843).\(^{28}\) The Japanese authorities feared that horimono would be a source of embarrassment if they were seen by foreigners. Thus, the Japanese people were forbidden to be tattooed. However, the foreigners who visited Japan were fascinated by the traditional art form. Even European royalty got tattooed! King George V of England (1865-1936) had a dragon tattoo on his arm.\(^{29}\)

However, the Tempo Reforms were successful in ending the popularity that tattoos experienced in Edo period Japan. The era of tattooing ended with Edo, but the art never disappeared. Tattoos were legalized for good after World War II and they have

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27 Richie and Buruma, 26-28.
since experienced periods of resurgence; however, they have remained largely an underground art. In modern Tokyo there are only a few masters adept in traditional tattooing, and many Japanese deny there is even a tradition of tattooing in their country.\(^{30}\)

Those people who do admit the tradition exists usually associate it with the *yakuza* crime organizations, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Iconography**

Japanese tattoos are full of symbolic meanings. There is a basic canon of designs and themes which nearly all *horimono* follow. The person being tattooed will pick a theme, but traditionally the tattoo master is the person who designs the piece. *Horimono* also differ from Western tattoos in that they are not just one tattoo on one part of the body. A true *horimono* refers to the full body suit. It should cover a person’s torso (front and back), half of their arms, and come down to mid thigh. This pattern mimes the Edo firefighter’s “suit.” The entire piece will be one complete design with many different symbols and closely resemble a *happi* coat, a short length overcoat.\(^{31}\) The most important part of the *horimono* is the back piece. Since this is the largest area on the body for displaying a picture this is where the central image is placed. According to Richie and Baruma there are three main categories of symbolic tattoos: flora and fauna, religious motifs, and folk heroes or figures.\(^{32}\)

Since the central design of the tattoo will not cover the entire body some filler is needed. However, the flora is typically restricted to only a few flowers: the peony,

\(^{30}\) Richie and Buruma, 32.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 39.
chrysanthemum, the cherry blossom, and the maple leaf. The peony and the chrysanthemum are Chinese symbols. The peony symbolizes wealth and good fortune in Chinese tradition, but the Japanese have also imbued it with gambling, daring, and masculine rakishness, mainly because in Edo period Japan many gamblers sported peony tattoos because the peony was depicted on playing cards. The chrysanthemum, specifically the sixteen-petal chrysanthemum, is actually the symbol for the imperial house but the flower is also a popular tattoo design. Its symbolic meaning is in its long life and medicinal attributes. Thus it is a symbol of steadfastness and determination. However, today these flowers are used in tattooing mostly just for filler. The maple leaf is also an extremely popular symbol. Much like the rose in Western tattooing the maple leaf is a symbol of enduring love, eternal fidelity, and transcendance over mundane life.

The cherry blossom is, however, an entirely Japanese symbol. The cherry blossom’s life is very short, but it is exceptionally beautiful. Their opening in the spring is a major event for the Japanese. Its meaning is also quite philosophical. As stated by Richie, “This loveliness lasts for but so short a time: how like life itself, where all things are ephemeral. It is said the samurai adopted the cherry blossom as a personal insignia, indicating that they may well die in battle the next day.” Its symbolism is a perfect indication of the Japanese mindset. The cherry blossom is beautiful because of its short life, not in spite of it. It is a perfect example of the mono no aware aesthetic of ephemeral beauty. Mono no aware can mean either “the sadness of things” or “the
sensitivity to things.”

It is the sensitivity one has when viewing something of great beauty, which is often a fleeting beauty. For the Japanese it is the annual anticipation of viewing cherry blossoms that make them so much more beautiful than other flowers. This rare beauty is far better than one that is constant. It is this Japanese aesthetic that make the cherry blossom an extremely popular symbol in horimono. The man wearing a cherry blossom acknowledges his own mortality and the fleeting quality of life.

Many animals are also figured in tattooing. However, such designs do not have a definite value attributed to them. The tiger and the lion are certainly associated with bravery, but they do not necessarily stand for the embodiment of bravery. They are usually just used as decorative elements. The carp and the dragon, in contrast, are highly symbolic. The carp, or koi, is one of the most prevalent symbols in all of Japan. The carp is admired because it bravely swims upstream and if caught lies calmly on the cutting board awaiting its fate. These stoic and steadfast qualities are considered especially masculine, and the carp has even been adopted as the symbol for the annual boys’ day. Many carp tattoos feature the fish swimming up a waterfall and are on the back, the perfect place for a vertical design. By wearing a carp the owner states that he is or wants also to be brave, steadfast, and stoic.

The dragon is a slightly more complex creature. Traditionally Japanese dragons are aquatic, so they embody two seemingly opposing elements of fire and water. Since it breathes fire and yet lives in the water, it represents the contrasting qualities of yin and yang. The dragon is usually shown with a pearl, ball, or jewel held in one claw. Richie

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39 Poysden and Bratt, 175.
40 Ibid., 171.
41 Richie and Buruma, 44.
explains further, “The origin of this jewel is the closed-lotus form which can still be seen on temple roof pinnacles, on the tops of stone grave markers and, sometimes, stone lanterns, and on various implements used in the Buddhist liturgy. Traditionally the object is said to contain the spiritual essence of the universe.”42 By holding the universe in his claws it can control the winds, rain, and even the movement of the planets. Thus the dragon is a symbol of power, and even the way the dragon looks is full of meanings. The dragon’s shape, be it coiled, rampant, or supine, is also important. A coiled dragon represents natural energy or perpetual change, the rampant dragon represents generation, and the supine dragon is dissolution. The dragon is a symbol of power, strength, wisdom, and true benevolence. The wearer of a dragon chooses this symbol as a way to aspire toward these qualities.43

Many horimono are religious, and may depict a Buddhist deity.44 For example, the twin guardian kings, the Nio, are a frequent subject of tattoos. Kannon, the so-called Goddess of Mercy, is also frequently tattooed.45 Her appearance in a tattoo may be considered both a prayer and as an indication of emulation.46 Fudo is equally as popular (fig. 5). He is the Guardian of Hell and a God of Wrath. He holds a flaming sword in his right hand to smite evil-doers and in his left hand he holds a rope to bind them. However, he is not an evil deity like the devils of Western tattoo tradition. He punishes wrong doers and loyally protects the faithful. The man wearing a Fudo tattoo identifies himself with the god. As Richie states, “Fudo is fierce but in a good cause; he lives in a bad

42 Richie and Buruma, 45.
43 Poysden and Bratt, 167.
44 The other major religion of Japan is Shinto, which it is anionic. Thus, it is not really possible for Shinto tattoos to even exist.
45 Hendry, 29.
46 Richie and Buruma, 48.
neighborhood but he also has good social value. Likewise, then, with those who have
chosen him to adorn their bodies. Fudo may be ugly (and usually is, with his fangs and
angry visage) but he is truly good at heart."47

Other tattoos come from folklore. Kintaro, or Koitaro, is a very popular figure.
He is a little boy and a slayer of bears in legend. However, in tattoos he is usually shown
with a carp. These two symbols of strength shown together create an even greater show
of fortitude. The symbolism is rather simple; Kintaro may be small but he possess great
strength.48

The Tattooing Process

The tattooing process in Japan is not extremely complicated. However, there is a
specific etiquette involved in the tattooing process that must be observed, even today.
The client must be introduced to the tattoo master by either another client or a personal
acquaintance of the master. It is nothing like an American tattoo parlor where a client
simply walks into the shop and is tattooed on site. In Japan the master must approve the
client via an interview. If he believes the person wishes to be tattooed for the wrong
reasons or is not serious about his request then the master will deny him.49

If the master approves the supplicant they will meet to discuss the desired design.
The person being tattooed chooses the design from the master’s design books, which are
based on traditional ukiyo-e and symbols, but the master decide where it will go. A
horimono is the full body tattoo, and the master must decide what placement will work

47 Richie and Buruma, 49.
48 Hendry, 29.
49 Ibid., 27.
best in the final result. The master is seldom interested in a partial tattoo but he will do them occasionally, although he refers to it as a *katate-ochi* or “single-arm omission.”\(^50\)

The first step is to draw the design directly onto the skin with a felt marker. After the design is complete the client and master will both approve the design and correct any mistakes. After the design is approved the master will start the tattoo by incising the outline of the design into the skin. For this part of the tattoo the master will use a four-needled tool, basically bundles of needles set into a wooden handle, and black *sumi* ink. *Sumi* is a traditional Japanese ink made from charcoal that is used in ink painting and calligraphy. The master’s left hand stretches the skin and will hold a brush charged with *sumi* ink. With his right hand he swipes the needle tool against the brush in order to collect ink and then inserts it into the skin at an angle. The process is repeated over and over in one smooth motion.\(^51\) Many contemporary tattoo artists use electric needles for the outline of the tattoo, but the traditional hand-applied method is far more prized. The electronically applied tattoos are called *sujibori*, literally meaning “linear hori,” while the entirely hand-applied pieces are *wabori*, “Japanese hori.”\(^52\)

Once the outline is complete the master will begin to shade and fill in the color. However, it is not uncommon for the client to fail to return for this portion. There are many reasons this could happen: the client may not have anticipated the pain involved or he may decide to go to a cheaper artist to fill in the color, although this is extremely unethical and a respectable master would not agree to do so. Men with only an outline are called “unfinished.”\(^53\) Originally only a few colors, made from natural ingredients,
were used: black, red, and brown. Now chemical inks provide a far greater palette but most traditional tattoo masters stick to using *sumi*, which turns blue under the skin, red, and sometimes brown, green, yellow, and gray. Different techniques and tools are used to create the intricate shading and color, and it is in this section of the tattoo that a master’s true talent is revealed. After the tattoo is complete the artist even signs his name.

The entire tattoo will take many sessions to complete. Each session is several hours of considerable pain. The client must rest and heal between sessions so the full-body tattoo will take around one year to complete. In total, 150-200 hours and ¥2 million, roughly $18,000, will be spent on the full-body tattoo. Obviously the expenditure of this much time and money is not undertaken lightly. The master considers the person he tattoos a representative of his work. In fact, the master considers the tattoo his property and it is he who gives permission for his tattoos to be photographed, not the person on whom they were created!

**Who is Tattooed in Modern Japan?**

The practice of tattooing is still an art form that is restricted mainly to the margins of society, as it was in Edo. Construction workers, drivers, hostesses/cocktail waitresses, and carpenters are among those who wear full-body tattoos in modern Japan. These people are tattooed for a variety of reasons: many have relatives with tattoos, some wish to belong to a group of some kind, in this case a tattoo community, and many simply do it for the beauty and artistic quality of the tattoo. Young people account for most of those

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54 Richie and Buruma, 99.
55 Information gathered in 1991 by Hendry, 27.
being tattooed, proof that the traditional art of horimono is not dying.\textsuperscript{56} Additionally the practice is becoming more acceptable for women. Many women with husbands involved in tattooing are also tattooed. The wives of artists are often exquisite examples of their husband’s mastery. Occasionally a couple will get tattoos that are not complete until they are embracing. This practice hearkens back to the irebokuro tradition in Edo.

Unfortunately when most people think of Japanese tattoos they associate them with yakuza. The yakuza are the Japanese mafia. In the late twentieth century there were 110,000 yakuza members in Japan. This is an astronomical number considering that in the United States, a country with twice the population of Japan, there are only around 20,000 mafia members.\textsuperscript{57} The yakuza are extremely active in Japan and they are involved in gambling, drugs, prostitution, gun smuggling, as well as legitimate business. They are also closely involved with some members of the government, and this is no secret in Japan. The yakuza consider themselves patriots and the heirs to the samurai tradition. They believe they are the modern-day samurai. They follow some of the same codes, like bushido, the samurai code of chivalry, which includes fierce loyalty to the death.\textsuperscript{58} Oddly enough, they are also partly responsible for the low crime rates in Japan. The yakuza incorporate young people who are outsiders and often recruit from teenage motorcycle gangs. They take the most dangerous rogues off the streets and teach them the discipline involved in being yakuza. For this reason a lot of Japanese, police included, tolerate the yakuza.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 56 Hendry, 28.
\item 57 David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro, \textit{Yakuza: Japan’s Criminal Underworld}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), xvii.
\item 58 Kitamura and Kitamura, 4.
\item 59 Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Much like in America there is a fascination with the criminal underworld in Japan and part of the allure of the yakuza is their elaborate and traditional full-body tattoos. Initiates are encouraged to get tattooed as a method of proving their loyalty and commitment to their kumi, or gang. The tattoo is significant for yakuza because it proves a man’s mettle. The pain involved is considerable and to willingly go through it for your kumi proves loyalty and “manliness.” It is also symbolic; a tattoo is permanent as is joining the yakuza. Frequently the name of their kumi is also included in the tattoo. Some bosses even pay for the tattoos of initiates.\textsuperscript{60} It is important to note, however, that although yakuza wear horimono not everyone with horimono are yakuza. Also, yakuza tattoos are created by master tattoo artists. They are not applied in prison like the criminal tattoos in the West.

Since the 1960s Japanese symbolism has been an extremely popular subject for tattoos in the United States, but very few people commit to the full body horimono. Dragons, Buddhas, and koi are especially popular. Likewise, Western-style tattooing, in both technique and imagery, is becoming popular in Japan. Many young Japanese get Western-style tattoos with an electric needle rather than the traditional form. However, the more people around the world become aware of horimono the better the art will be preserved for future generations. Masters are actively training apprentices and with the growing popularity of tattooing horimono is a tradition that people will perpetuate as a Japanese art and not a yakuza trait. Horimono has a history that is distinct from and as legitimate as ukiyo-e.

Chapter 2
The History and Imagery of American Tattoos

The American tattooing tradition is rooted in the tattooing traditions of the Pacific islands.\textsuperscript{61} Exploration, colonialism, and missionary activity by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reintroduced tattooing, which had been absent from Europe since the very early Middle Ages, to Europeans and Americans.\textsuperscript{62} The first Western accounts of tattooing were written in 1769 when Captain James Cook (1728 – 1779) discovered Tahiti.\textsuperscript{63} The naturalist on his ship, Joseph Banks, described the skin markings of the Polynesian people in detail.\textsuperscript{64} Captain Cook was the first person from the Western world to use the term tattoo when referring to the practice of injecting ink into the skin. The English word tattoo actually comes from the Tahitian word \textit{ta-tu} or \textit{tatau}.

Prior to the introduction of Cook’s terminology tattoos were commonly referred to in the West as “pricks” or “marks.”\textsuperscript{65} The crews from his earliest voyages were the first Europeans to be tattooed in the same manner as the native Tahitians and Hawaiians.\textsuperscript{66} Upon their return home these newly tattooed sailors reintroduced tattooing to Europe. Before this time tattoos were virtually unknown in Europe due to a ban by Pope Hadrian

\textsuperscript{61} Natives in North America also practiced a tradition of tattooing. However, European writers were not very interested in this practice and very little contemporary writing has survived. Steve Gilbert, ed., \textit{“Tattoo History: A Sourcebook}, (New York: Juno Books, LLC, 2000), 89.

\textsuperscript{62} African slaves were frequently branded or tattooed by their owners in order to identify them. Also, there are many African tribes that have tattoo traditions, which are frequently facial tattoos. However, there is not any evidence that those brands or tattoos had any impact on the tattoos of white Americans.


\textsuperscript{65} DeMello, 45.

\textsuperscript{66} Allen and Gilbert, 23.
in AD 787. In the ancient Roman world tattoos were used only punitively and for marking slaves.\textsuperscript{67}

The traditional designs of Polynesian tattoos were black patterns and bands of color. However, by the early nineteenth century voyagers noted that Polynesians and European sailors alike were being tattooed with images incorporating rifles, cannons, ships, and dates.\textsuperscript{68} Thus began a cultural exchange that was vital in reintroducing the tattoo to Europe. Before Cook’s voyages tattoos were almost unknown in Europe. However, without the European influence on tattoo imagery it is doubtful tattoos would have been seen in the West as anything more than a primitive curiosity.

While tattoos gained popularity in Europe in the eighteenth century they were declining in Polynesia. After the sailors made contact with Polynesians missionaries and colonists quickly followed. Since the designs of most Polynesian tattoos were meant to protect its wearer from spiritual harm missionaries discouraged tattooing as remnants of native superstition.\textsuperscript{69} Colonists also worked to change the native way of life. Native people were made to wear western clothing and work under western authority: thus tattoos were seen as a threat and often outlawed because they were associated with the native way of life.\textsuperscript{70} The tattoos were extremely important for native identity and thus the colonists banned anything that would remind them of their previous way of life.

Upon returning from long voyages in the Pacific European sailors returned not only with tattoos of their own, but also with tattooed people from the islands they had visited. Writer and tattoo historian Margo DeMello states,

\textsuperscript{68} DeMello, 45.
\textsuperscript{69} Allen and Gilbert, 23.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
While tattoos and other forms of body modifications have stood since the earliest encounters with Polynesians as a hallmark of the primitive, the display of tattooed ‘natives’ in pubs, dime museums, and fairs helped solidify these notions of the primitive Other.71

Prince Jeoly was the first extensively tattooed native on record to be displayed in Europe. Born in the Philippines he was referred to as “The Painted Prince” and was actually purchased by several businessmen in the last year of the seventeenth century. He was displayed in public for a fee by his owners for several months until he died of smallpox.72

In America the practice of publicly displaying tattooed native people did not start until much later and was in conjunction with displays of “native villages.” Philadelphia’s Centennial Exhibition in 1876 was the first time native people, from places like Alaska, Hawaii, or Samoa, were actually on display in America. The exhibition claimed to recreate native environments in order to allow fairgoers a glimpse into the life of the “other.”73 While these exhibitions were not meant to be like sideshows it still emphasized a sense of primitiveness and “otherness,” which contributed to the public perception of tattoos for decades.

Although tattooing was seen as a primitive art form, many members of European and American high society were tattooed themselves by artists operating in major cities. This was especially popular with European aristocracy. According to English tattooist George Burchett (1872 – 1953), King Edward VII (1841 – 1910) started this trend.74 These tattoos consisted of badge-like images arranged on the body without much logic. They were typically military insignia, hearts, banners, roses, or Asian designs like

71 DeMello 47.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 48.
74 Ibid., 50.
dragons. However, in 1891 Samuel O’Reilly (? -1908) invented the first electric tattoo machine which allowed the artist to use several needles at once for outlining and shading. This signaled the decline of tattooing among aristocracy because previous tattoos were applied by hand, making them time-consuming and rather expensive. After 1891 tattoos were applied quickly, cheaply, and less painfully than ever before. Thus, tattooing spread among the lower classes and was abandoned by the aristocracy.

The invention of the electric tattoo machine also signified the birth of the true Americana style of tattooing. These tattoos are characterized by a thick black outline and shading and a small amount of color, usually red, yellow, green, and/or blue. The first known professional tattoo artist was an American named Martin Hildebrandt. He set up a permanent shop in 1846 in New York City and was instrumental in establishing the tradition of tattooing servicemen. The navy was an especially good provider of customers for tattoo artists due to the tradition of tattooed sailors, and times of war were always good for business. Thus, most tattoo parlors were located in port towns near the shore, where the sailors could easily find them. Soldiers from all branches of the armed forces were typically tattooed with either patriotic designs or designs that would remind them of home, like their girl’s name. A more detailed discussion of specific designs will follow later in this chapter.

The circus was also a major locus for tattooed people. For centuries tattooed individuals were called “freaks” were displayed throughout Europe and America as entertainment for a paying crowd. It was in the 1840s that these traveling shows became

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75 DeMello, 50.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 49.
79 Ibid., 51.
a part of circuses as sideshows. The term “freak” referred to both those born with disfigurements and those who made themselves into freaks, like tattooed people.\textsuperscript{80} P.T. Barnum was instrumental in bringing the freak show to prominence. In 1840 he became the proprietor of the American Museum and quickly learned that it was the human attractions that brought the most money and attention rather than stuffed wild animals and old artifacts.\textsuperscript{81} Freak shows traveled with circuses and carnivals until the middle of the twentieth century and provided people with a glimpse of something unlike themselves.

In the early years of freak shows the proprietors continued the tradition of displaying tattooed natives in their sideshows. However, in the later part of the nineteenth century Westerners also started to tattoo themselves in order to perform in sideshows. At first the crowds were satisfied merely by the sight of a white person covered in tattoos, but as competition grew the proprietors had to come up with new methods of selling their product. They began to invent stories of kidnapping and barbarism in order to explain their tattoos. For example, a Greek man named George “Prince” Constentenus traveled with P.T. Barnum’s circus. He entertained the crowds not only with his elaborate tattoos but also with tales of his adventures. He claimed that he was married to a native princess, taken prisoner, tattooed as a means of torture, and then escaped to travel around Africa and Asia where he continued to have amazing adventures.\textsuperscript{82} Stories like Constentenus’s accompanied every tattooed performer in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{80} DeMello, 53.
\bibitem{81} Ibid., 54.
\end{thebibliography}
American circuses. However, eventually the public tired of these tales and a new type of
tattooed performer emerged: the tattooed lady.

Tattooed women very quickly upstaged their male counterparts thanks in large
part to the Victorian morals of the late nineteenth centuries. In order to display their
tattoos the women had to show their arms and legs, which was considered quite racy at
the time.\textsuperscript{83} The women also told elaborate tales of the origin of their tattoos. They
usually involved tales of capture and torture via tattooing. The handbills that
accompanied their performances included images of a proper lady in full Victorian dress
accompanied by an image of her forceful tattooing. Thus, these women were both proper
ladies and something exotic.\textsuperscript{84} Betty Broadbent was the most famous tattooed lady in
American history (fig. 6). She worked with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and
Bailey Circus beginning in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{85} It was estimated that she had around 365
tattoos, which she acquired over a two-year period in New York. She always considered
her act to be classy and she wore a modest knee-length bathing suit in her early shows.
Later, when women were freer to wear shorter bathing suits she had her thighs tattooed as
well. However, she always maintained a lady-like demeanor and was considered by
fellow performers as feminine and refined.\textsuperscript{86}

Eventually the popularity of tattooed performers and freak shows in general began
to fade. Carnival promoters tried to pique the interest of the crown through more
elaborate productions like tattooed sword swallowers, tattooed fat ladies, tattooed
dwarves, and even tattooed animals but by the middle of the twentieth century freak

\textsuperscript{83} DeMello, 58.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Margot Mifflin, \textit{Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo} (New York: Juno Books,
2001), 30.
\textsuperscript{86} DeMello, 59.
shows were a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{87} After World War II medical authorities and social reformers attacked freak shows for their practice of displaying deformed individuals for the amusement of others. Also, the circus-going public had become far more educated and worldly by this time, and they no longer believed the elaborate and far-fetched stories of the stories behind the performers.\textsuperscript{88} Competition from movies and television also hurt the profits of the circuses, and by the 1950s only a few large acts remained and those few dropped the freak shows altogether.

In the twentieth century tattoo as a business evolved greatly. Tattooists set up shops in small spaces next to barber shops, in dirty corners of arcades, under circus tents, or on carnival midways. These places on the margins of society became havens for all kinds of men: sailors, carnies, drunks, laborers, and young men who wanted to learn to tattoo.\textsuperscript{89} The shop was a place for men to tell tales of their exploits. The sailors told war stories while the tattoo artists told stories of their strangest clients. Talk was frequently lewd and sexual. Women were mostly absent from the tattoo scene until the 1970s. Since the shops themselves were places into which no respectable woman would set foot, very few were ever tattooed. Many artists had their own set of rules regarding female clients. In his account of tattooing in the 1950s tattoo artist Samuel Stewart wrote that he refused to tattoo a woman unless she was twenty-one, married and accompanied by her husband, and had the documentation to prove it. Lesbians were the only exception to the marriage rule since they would not have an angry husband or boyfriend who would come after the tattoo artist, but they still had to be twenty-one. Stewart stated that “nice girls

\textsuperscript{87} Gilbert, 138.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{89} DeMello, 59-60.
don’t get tattooed” and he actively dissuaded some girls from getting tattooed at all.90
Tattooed women were viewed as being loose or promiscuous, although there is no specific record of tattooing amongst prostitutes like there is in the Japanese tradition.

After World War II many municipal authorities began to keep a closer watch on tattooing due to lax hygienic conditions in many shops. Tattoo parlors were fined for failing to sterilize needles and for tattooing minors, both of which were rarely enforced regulations before the war. Health regulations were also tightened forcing many parlors to close entirely.91 By the 1960s cities in many states, including New York, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Ohio, began to ban tattooing entirely due to outbreaks of hepatitis. Also, many servicemen returned to civilian life and regretted their tattoos when neither their women nor employers appreciated their patriotic wartime tattoos.92 However, many in the working class were still tattooed and a new group introduced an iconic style of tattooing to America: the biker tattoo.

The biker tattoo represented a new form of defiance. Tattoo scholar Margo DeMello states that, “Tattooing in this period became a form of defiance, a challenge to both the emerging mainstream middle-class values as well as to the traditional form of patriotic and love-inspired working-class tattoo.”93 Many bikers were outlaws and received their tattoos in prison, often as a means of identifying themselves with a specific gang. It is this association with prison that created such a negative view of the biker tattoo. Also, their tattoos were not traditional patriotic emblems, but were deliberately anti-social and were often motorcycle brand logos or gang symbols. Bikers proudly

90 DeMello, 61.
91 Ibid., 66.
92 Ibid., 67.
93 Ibid.
displayed their tattoos, usually black and often done by hand, on their arms and chests. This period of tattooing solidified society’s negative view of tattooing.\textsuperscript{94} To this day the image of a biker tattoo is iconic in the minds of many Americans. As DeMello summarizes, tattooing was no longer associated with the “savages” from the Pacific Islands; new savages had emerged to take their place.\textsuperscript{95}

In the 1960s and 1970s the counterculture movement further changed American tattooing. The events and ideals of the era including the Vietnam War, the women’s liberation movement, the gay liberation movement, and the civil rights movement shook the United States and the stability of the middle-class. Rebellious youths followed the lead of the highly publicized bikers and got tattoos of their own. However, their tattoos were often images of the 1960s including peace signs, marijuana leaves, and zodiac symbols. Also, many young and popular celebrities like Janis Joplin, Peter Fonda, and Cher were tattooed and displayed them publicly.\textsuperscript{96} Musicians were especially active in the tattooing community as were many hippies.

A San Francisco tattoo artist named Lyle Tuttle was instrumental in the increasing popularity of tattooing in the 1960s and 1970s. He was one of the only tattoo artists in San Francisco so he frequently tattooed celebrities and hippies.\textsuperscript{97} Tuttle then used the media attention he received to launch a publicity campaign promoting tattooing. He and his shop were featured in \textit{Time} and \textit{Life} magazines, local newspapers, and television shows throughout the seventies.\textsuperscript{98} Tuttle explained tattoos in an article from \textit{Time} magazine, “Tattoos are merely another physical form of form expression, a way to say

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 76.
something immediately with the body.”

99 Tuttle was also instrumental in updating the health regulations governing tattooing. He worked with the Department of Communicable Diseases in San Francisco to write new health regulations for tattoo shops. These new city and state regulations included sanitation and sterilization guidelines for needles, ink, and the shop itself. Since health concerns were the source of much of the negativity surrounding tattoos Tuttle’s steps toward resolving these problems were vital in changing the public opinion.

100 The changing perspectives on tattooing in the 1960s and 1970s created the tattooing culture that exists today. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s tattooing spread to all levels of society, and those bearing tattoos were no longer automatically associated with criminal activity. A “tattoo community” emerged with the development of large scale and well-organized tattoo conventions, magazines, books, and now websites devoted entirely to tattoos. Additionally, this era saw an explosion in the number of tattoo studios across the United States. 101 Parlors now exist in all parts of a city: urban, suburban, and even rural areas. The large amount of studios suggests that tattoos are now in high demand. According to a Harris Poll survey conducted in 2003, sixteen per cent of all Americans have at least one tattoo. Of those polled, people aged eighteen to forty made up the largest group of tattooed Americans. 102 These numbers indicate that tattooing has never been more popular than in the last twenty years.

100 DeMello, 78.
The American Style

Unlike the tattooing imagery of Japan, the American tradition is not a collection of traditional images with set iconographical meanings. However, it does have a traditional formal style that was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The invention of the tattoo machine in 1890 was essential in creating this style. Until the middle of the twentieth century the American style was the only type of tattooing available. However, after the 1950s artists began to experiment with other forms of tattooing, like Japanese. Today tattoo artists often specialize in different forms including American traditional, Japanese, tribal, portraits, or religious. Thus American tattooing has become like America itself: a melting pot of traditions.

The American traditional style is actually fairly simple. The tattoos are characterized by a thick black outline and shading and a small amount of color, usually red, yellow, green, and/or blue. The American style was especially popular in the early twentieth century, and the popularity of tattoos among soldiers in the World Wars solidified the style. At that time tattoos were chosen based on designs displayed in a particular shop. These sheets of tattoo designs were called flash and ranged from beautiful hand-painted works done by the artist to designs blatantly copied from another artist’s shop. Flash sheets also included prices. In this era tattoos were priced simply by the design, and many were fairly inexpensive. The cheapest were called a “pork chop sheet” and consisted of designs that cost one dollar or less. The designs from these sheets

103 DeMello, 72.
104 Ibid., 50.
accounted for a large portion of a tattooist’s income, thus they allowed him to eat pork chops rather than hamburger.\textsuperscript{106}

The designs were primarily the imagery that was popular among the servicemen of the World Wars. The large majority of the designs were patriotic and were intended to indicate the wearer’s bravery, like military insignia, ships, American flags, eagles, et cetera (fig. 7).\textsuperscript{107} Many were mementos of home and to remind the soldier why he was fighting. For example, the classic “mom” tattoo was popularized at this time. The tattoos could also be racy. Pin-up girls were a frequently used motif and they were often pictured topless, which did not always please the officials in the armed forces. In 1909 the navy declared that “indecent” or “obscene” tattooing would be grounds for the rejection of an applicant.\textsuperscript{108} However, they also gave the enlistees a chance to cover the tattoo and thus many tattoo artists made a living at tattooing “clothing” such tattoos.\textsuperscript{109} They would simply tattoo over the existing tattoo. Placement of the tattoos also contributed to their meaning. For example, when a sailor had logged five thousand miles at sea he got a bluebird on his chest, and after ten thousand miles he got another on the other side. If he crossed the equator he got Neptune on his leg and a pig on one foot and a rooster on the other protected a sailor from drowning.\textsuperscript{110} These tattoos were meant to be displayed and the primary areas for tattooing were the back, chest, biceps, the front, side, and back of the forearms, and both sides of the calves. The thighs, sides, and under the arms were ignored and tattooing the face and hands was prohibited due to the stigma

\textsuperscript{106} DeMello, 53.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 64.
against facial tattoos. However, the reason facial tattoos are so taboo in American society is unclear.

Carnival and circus performers also had their own imagery. The “folk style” was their tattoo of choice. This style is similar in appearance to the American style: it has the same heavy black outline and color palette, but it was applied differently. Since performers had to cover as much skin as possible their skin became an agglomeration of designs, sometimes done by a few different artists, which resulted in a collection of conflicting sizes and images (fig. 8). Most of the designs were relatively small and were chosen from a collection of flash. They were basically badge-like designs placed all over the body without any obvious relationship between them. The imagery was also rather similar to the American traditional style; a lot of designs were patriotic. The tattooed female performers wore tattoos that were patriotic and religious. Thus, they were able to maintain the paradox of being both a proper lady and an exotic creature that so intrigued their audiences.

Biker tattoos are a category unto themselves. As previously mentioned, they are very different from the traditional American style. Biker tattoos are often either obtained in prison or made to look like they were obtained in prison. They are usually done only in black ink and usually convey an anti-social message. Motorcycle logos, especially the Harley Davidson logo, and gang logos are frequent subjects. Additionally, bikers want others to see their tattoos so they have them applied on prominent places on their

111 DeMello, 65.
113 DeMello, 58.
bodies. The wearers want other people to see their ink, both for pride and a desire to intimidate others. Thus, they are a vital part of the biker community. Having the proper tattoos grants a person acceptance into the biker world and identifies a person as part of the community. This is very much like the *yakuza* tattoos, which were previously discussed.

In the 1960s, tattoo artists began to experiment with the traditional Japanese style, specifically Japanese motifs, designs, and techniques. Previously there had been some Eastern designs, but these were very stereotypical and even derogatory at times. The exploration of Japanese tattoos did not only introduce Japanese designs to America, but it also brought the Japanese concept of harmony to American tattoo art. A traditional Japanese *horimono* covers most of the body, yet it is also a comprehensive design (fig. 9). American tattoos before the 1960s were simply random images scattered across the body without a unified motif. In the sixties artists adopted this concept of harmony in tattooing and created more unified designs. This does not necessarily mean that all the designs were Japanese, although artists did adopt Japanese motifs. Artist Ed Hardy was instrumental in popularizing Japanese designs. In 1966 he saw pictures of Japanese tattoos in a book by Japanese cultural and film historian Donald Richie and he was immediately fascinated. He realized that American tattooing had room for growth and started incorporating the Japanese style into his work. Hardy even contacted Japanese tattoo artists and journeyed to Japan to further study the art. He still maintains

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114 DeMello, 68.
115 Ibid.
117 Kitamura, 53.
relationships with Japanese tattoo artists and his work is a blend of the traditional American style and Japanese style (fig. 10).

The adoption of the Japanese style inspired exploration of other tattooing cultures throughout the world. Today tattoo artists practice many different styles of traditional tattooing including Maorian, Thai, Hawai’ian, Celtic, Native American and Bornean-inspired designs. The popularity of these designs is the direct result of people exploring their heredity. Typically all of these styles fall under the category of “tribal” tattooing.118 These tattoos are frequently applied in black ink only and for many clients represent an exploration and respect of past cultures. Maori tattoos are experiencing a resurgence among the native people of New Zealand and in America there is a strong interest in this style as well (fig. 11). Additionally, Hawai’ian people are exploring their native tattooing tradition (fig. 12). Traditional Hawai’ian tattooing experienced a revival in the 1980s when the social and political climate was such that Hawaiians were once again proud of their cultural heritage and is still strong today.119 In 1893 American sugar farmers stormed the Hawai’ian royal palace and executed a coup against Queen Liliuokalani (1838 – 1917).120 Thus, many Hawai’ians believe the United States is occupying Hawai’i illegally and do not consider themselves citizens of the United States. They are fiercely proud of their heritage and many Hawai’ians express this pride through traditional tattooing. Hawai’ian tattoos have multiple and personal meanings for their wearers. For example, Keaali’i Reichel wears a design that represents his mother’s lineage from the Big Island. Her family name, Poli’ahu, is also the name of the snow goddess. Thus, his

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119 Ibid.
tattoo abstractly depicts the snowcapped peak of Mauna Kea. It is a mark of one’s inner self, one’s values and priorities, and personal histories. Like many other tribal styles Hawaiian tattoos are largely abstract and have very ancient meanings. Hawai’ian tattoos are just one example of the popular tribal style in the United States. Many of the people that obtain these tattoos do so as a homage to native cultures.

Today artists also create their own designs, and the images are not necessarily iconic. Also, designs may have a symbolic meaning only to the wearer. Many designs are also abstract. They may have roots in a certain cultural tradition but are isolated from their original context and thus take on an entirely new meaning. In addition, many contemporary artists charge hourly rather than pricing by design, and they work solely by appointment. This allows them to select both clients and subject matter with far more artistic freedom. They are also no longer limited by their color palette. Today artists use more than thirty different colors of ink that allow for an amazing variety in technique and shading. Conventions, professional magazines devoted exclusively to tattooing, and technologically advanced suppliers, rather than the shady underground supply chains of the past, have allowed astounding growth in the field, and more innovations are sure to follow.

121 Allen, 135.
122 Ibid., 129.
124 Ibid.
When one considers more established arts, such as painting and sculpture, they share many characteristics with tattoos that are not immediately apparent to one unfamiliar with tattooing. First, tattooing has a tradition of great masters, those that other contemporary practitioners consider the best practitioners of their art. These masters not only provide inspiration for future generations, but they also prove that the art form in question has an established history. Also, tattooing has a system for training new artists. Historically most artists were trained in a master-apprentice system and this is still the case for many tattoo artists, especially in Japan. However, many tattoo artists today are trained in universities as fine artists and are often mentored by more experienced artists. Tattooing is also in a state of constant growth and progression. Contrary to popular belief, contemporary tattooing possesses all of these qualities. Additionally, traditional Japanese tattooing also has a very close relationship to Japanese woodblock prints. The woodblock prints are certainly considered a legitimate art form today, thus this relationship lends legitimacy to Japanese tattooing as well. However, this argument applies only to Japanese tattoos.

**Tradition of Master Artists**

The world of tattooing consists of thousands of artists, but just like in any other artistic tradition there are those tattooists who are considered masters. In Japan Horiyoshi III is considered to be the most talented tattoo artists in the country (fig. 13). He was
born Yoshihito Nakano in 1946. As a boy he was very interested in tattoos and even experimented on his own legs. At twenty-one he met the man who would eventually become his master, Yoshitsugu Muramatsu, Horiyoshi of Yokohama.\textsuperscript{125} When Muramatsu retired in 1971 he passed on his professional name to his son, who became Horiyoshi II of Yokohama, and to his star pupil, Nakano, who is now known as Horiyoshi III. Horiyoshi III currently operates two studios in Yokohama; one is in Ise-Cho and is a more traditional studio. It is a single room above a row of houses. The space is not marked as a tattoo studio and is very small, allowing only one artist to work at a time. The other studio, which is located in Noge, operates on a main shopping street with its name advertised on the window. This studio is much larger than the Ise-Cho studio and allows several artists to work in the space synchronously.\textsuperscript{126} Throughout his life Horiyoshi III has collected artwork and collectables related to tattooing and in 1999 he opened the Yokohama Tattoo Museum in order to share his personal collection with the public. Artists from all over the world have visited the museum, often donating artwork, machines, and tattoo memorabilia to the museum.\textsuperscript{127}

Horiyoshi III is known internationally as one of the most talented artists in the world, but he is also a teacher and author. Thanks to increased globalization Horiyoshi III has apprentices all over the world. Through email and fax machines they are able to study “with” Horiyoshi III without leaving their home countries. Although this is not the traditional method of training, it is a way for Horiyoshi III to spread Japanese techniques throughout the world. Also, these worldwide apprentices are already trained as tattoo artists, and he is simply educating them in the Japanese style. Horiyoshi III emphasizes

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{125} Kitamura, 85.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
the traditions of Japanese tattooing, especially keeping *tebori*, the Japanese hand
tattooing technique. Horiyoshi III himself only uses an electric machine for fine outlines
and he does so reluctantly and only to better his art.\textsuperscript{128} By using a machine he can create
much more precise lines and thus create tattoos that are that much closer to the *ukiyo-e*
style. Horiyoshi III is also the creator of three reference books of Japanese tattoos. Each
book is a collection of drawings. The first, \textit{100 Demons}, is collection of Japanese
folktales. The second, \textit{108 Heroes of the Suikoden}, is his version of the popular tale that
was popularized in the Edo period by the printmaker Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797 – 1861).
The third is a collection of severed heads, a subject that has been frequently depicted in
Horiyoshi III’s art and a common theme in much of the traditional art depicting samurai
warriors.\textsuperscript{129} Horiyoshi III has contributed to the tattooing community through his art, his
promotion of tattooing in general, and his training of future artists. He is recognized
worldwide, and he is one of the most respected tattoo artists in the entire world because
of his talent and devotion to tattooing.

In the U.S.A. Don Ed Hardy is considered one of the most legendary tattoo artists
of all time (fig. 14). He was born in California in 1945 and was intrigued by tattoos even
as a young boy. He often drew tattoo designs on the arms of friends. He attended the
San Francisco Art Institute and earned a B.F.A. in printmaking. He first encountered
Japanese-style tattooing in the studio of Phil Sparrow and conducted most of his training
under him.\textsuperscript{130} Sparrow was an extremely influential artist since he trained many tattoo
artists and was instrumental in popularizing the Japanese style in America. In the next
decade Hardy trained under and worked with tattoo artists all over California. He

\textsuperscript{128} Kitamura, 85.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 85-86.
\textsuperscript{130} DeMello, 79.
corresponded with a Hawaiian tattoo artist named Sailor Jerry, the man who is considered to epitomize the classic American style, and even traveled to Japan in 1973 to study the Japanese style. Upon his return to the United States in 1974 Hardy opened Realistic Tattoo, a studio in San Francisco. It was the first studio in the United States to operate by appointment only and custom design only. This studio served as a model for artists all over the country who were interested in taking their work to a higher level, both artistically and financially.  

Throughout his career Hardy experimented with new techniques and collaborated with artists of all different styles. In 1982 he also founded TattooTime, the first magazine devoted to tattooing. The magazine targeted a middle class audience and aimed to educate people about tattooing rather than to sensationalize the art.  

Also in 1982, Hardy staged the Tattoo Expo in Long Beach, California aboard the Queen Mary cruise ship along with several other tattoo artists. While it was not the first tattoo convention in existence it was the first that included lectures and slide shows aimed at educating the public about tattoos and tattoo safety.  

Hardy is also a tattoo scholar, writing many books and articles about the history of the art form. Additionally, Hardy exhibits paintings and prints at galleries all over the world. Thus he attracts the attention of people outside the tattooing world and is able to expose a larger audience to the themes and formal qualities of tattooing.  

His lifelong work to promote tattooing, as well as his own artwork, has been invaluable to the changing attitudes about tattooing in the United States.

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131 DeMello, 80.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Kitamura, 60.
Training

Contemporary Japanese tattoo artists are trained in a very strict master-apprentice system. For the first few years of his training, which begins in his teens, the apprentice does not actually learn how to tattoo but serves as an errand boy for his master and he sometimes even lives in his master’s house.\textsuperscript{135} This is the same training method used in many traditional arts of Japan. After years of loyal service the master slowly teaches his apprentice everything he knows. He instructs his apprentice both technical and artistic skills, such as how to make tools and how to use them on the skin. Japanese artists make their own tools and mix their own ink. The apprentice learns by copying drawings from his master’s pattern book and by practicing on his own skin or other apprentices.\textsuperscript{136} His first work on clients is in assisting his master by filling in large areas of solid color, and then he learns shading methods. When the master judges his work is sufficient then his training is completed. Then the master gives him a new name to signify the completion of his training. The first part of the name contains the word \textit{hori} meaning “to engrave,” while the second part is part of his master’s name.\textsuperscript{137} This tradition of naming is also found in the Japanese art traditions. To apprentice with a master is essentially to become part of his family. Often a worthy apprentice is even declared his master’s heir if the master has no sons of his own. Thus the master and apprentice create a lifelong bond, with the master often referring his clients to his former apprentice upon his retirement.\textsuperscript{138}

In the United States, training for a tattoo artist is not quite as rigorous, but they are also trained in the master-apprentice system. This is one of the few art forms that still

\textsuperscript{135} Poysden and Bratt, 109.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
maintains this training system. Today, most fine artists obtain formal training in universities. Until recently very few tattoo artists had any formal university training, however, in the contemporary tattooing community in the United States a large number of tattoo artists have a background in fine arts. This change really began in the 1980s, just after the tattoo renaissance of the 1970s. Art historian Arnold Rubin writes, “…most of these tattoo artists appear less drawn to the field by the traditional economic factors…than by the intrinsic appeal of the medium.”\textsuperscript{139} This is significant because in the early years of tattooing in America most tattooists were drawn to the profession because they could make a decent amount of money quickly. Those educated in fine art thus have training not only in how to operate an electric needle but also know all the skills of a professional artist like drawing, painting, portraiture, and color theory. Thus, these artists are able to create tattoos of a higher artistic quality than those of the past.

**Tattooing and Ukiyo-e**

Traditional Japanese tattooing has a very close relationship with the art of Japanese woodblock prints, *ukiyo-e*, from the Edo Period (1603-1868). *Ukiyo-e* literally means “floating world pictures,” and the term applies to images of the pleasure quarters and *kabuki* theater. As art historian Donald Jenkins states, “… the pleasures referred to were not just any pleasures but, rather, those associated with a certain extravagance and high living.”\textsuperscript{140} In the strict social hierarchy of Edo period Japan the merchant class occupied the lowest level, yet they were among the wealthiest people in the country. The

\textsuperscript{139} Arnold Rubin, “Prologue to a History of the Tattoo Renaissance,” paper presented at the *Art of the Body Symposium*, University of California at Los Angeles, 29 January 1983 (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988); quoted in Govenar, 84.

government restricted the ways in which the commoners, including merchants, could spend their money. In the world of courtesans and actors social status did not matter, however, and those who could afford to do so enjoyed the freedom the pleasure quarters offered. Thus they frequented the pleasure quarters. *Ukiyo-e* served as a means to capture the floating world in art. The prints were very inexpensive, and thus became an art for the people. It depicted not only the courtesans and *kabuki* actors, but also all things popular like poetry and popular prose. These prints have provided the imagery for the tattoo artists in the Edo period and today.

However, it was not just *ukiyo-e* that influenced tattooing; tattoos also inspired *ukiyo-e*. As discussed in chapter one, the *Suikoden* was an extremely popular subject for both tattooing and *ukiyo-e*. The heroes of the *Suikoden* wore tattoos themselves, thus their tattooed chests, backs, arms, and legs are frequently displayed in *ukiyo-e* prints. The popularity of these prints triggered a surge in tattooing. The men of the *Suikoden* represented the ultimate form of masculinity, and this overt masculinity inspired many young men of the lower classes in Edo to get tattoos of their own.141 One of the great *ukiyo-e* artists was Utagawa Kuniyoshi and it was his series of *Suikoden* prints that were the most popular. In his research of tattooing Horiyoshi III writes that in addition to providing prints for tattoos Kuniyoshi himself was tattooed.142 In fact, his nickname was “scarlet skin” because of them. Kuniyoshi and his students, including Katsushika Hokusai, even created designs specifically for tattooing.143 Even today Kuniyoshi’s *Suikoden* prints are published in books meant specifically for tattoo designs. Thus the traditional *horimono* often look exactly like traditional *ukiyo-e* (fig. 15). The figures are

141 Kitamura and Kitamura, 13.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
generalized with only iconographic references to identify them. However, it is mostly the images of heroic characters that are depicted in tattoos. Courtesans and kabuki actors were not a common motif, although in Western versions of Japanese tattoos beautiful women are a very common theme.

Not only did horimono and ukiyo-e share imagery, but they also shared many of the terms used for each art form. For example, the word hori means “to carve or engrave” and this was the specific word used for carving the wood used for the block in printing. Also, both arts used the same pigments. Traditionally black sumi ink, which is also used in ink painting and calligraphy, is used to create the outline and for shading. The other colors were all natural vegetable pigments, mostly blue, red, yellow, and green, and were the same for both ukiyo-e and horimono. Additionally, the two arts had the same method for training new artists, the master-apprentice system.

This close association between the two arts further lends legitimacy to Japanese tattooing because ukiyo-e only recently gained legitimacy of its own in the art world. Until the 1960s ukiyo-e prints were considered simply an object of popular culture in Edo. Ukiyo-e prints were very popular with Impressionist painters in the West, but they were collected more than studied. In Japan the prints were seen more as media than art. Throughout the twentieth century there were societies devoted to ukiyo-e, but they never lasted more than a few years. However, in 1962 the third Ukiyo-e Society of Japan was founded and it still exists to this day. The society publishes a journal entitled Ukiyo-e Geijutsu and sponsors exhibitions of ukiyo-e throughout Japan.

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144 Richie and Buruma, 96-97.
146 Ibid., 103.
In the United States a very similar organization, the Ukiyo-e Society of America, was founded in 1973 when collecting *ukiyo-e* had just started to gain popularity. After World War II American soldiers often returned form Japan with prints, but until the 1960s London was the main hub of *ukiyo-e* collections. However, in the late 1960s the Parke-Bernet Galleries, which later merged with Southeby’s, hired Martin Lorber to develop a market for Japanese art. The first major auction of *ukiyo-e* was the sale of the Blanche McFetridge estate in 1969.147 A landmark event was an auction held in 1974 at Southeby’s. This sale contained some of the highest quality prints ever sold and attracted collectors from all over the world, including Japan. The sale also caused a jump in the prices of *ukiyo-e* at galleries all over the world.148 This auction took place in the first year of the Ukiyo-e Society of America and certainly contributed to the society’s growth. The society publishes *Impressions*, a peer-reviewed journal since 1997, and organizes exhibitions and lectures to promote interest in *ukiyo-e*. The society frequently publishes articles by scholars of *ukiyo-e* as a means to legitimize the study of the art form and their efforts eventually paid off.149 Throughout the eighties and into the nineties there were *ukiyo-e* exhibitions all over the world, such as *The Floating World Revisited* at the Portland Art Museum in 1993. These exhibitions proved that *ukiyo-e* had reached a level of legitimacy in the “art world.”

The tattooing community is progressing on a similar path as *ukiyo-e*. There are publications dedicated to tattooing, such as Don Ed Hardy’s *Tattoo Time*. At this time it is a magazine, not a peer-reviewed journal, but there are scholars writing about tattooing.

148 Ibid., 105.
149 Ibid., 106.
Marcia Tucker published an article about tattooing in *ArtForum*\(^{150}\) and Cyril Siorat wrote about tattoos in a *Fashion Theory* article.\(^{151}\) Exhibitions are not easy with tattooing since a person’s skin is the medium, but there have been exhibitions of tattoo drawings such as *Pierced Hearts and True Love: A Century of Drawings for Tattoos* at the Drawing Center in New York in 1995. Certainly more exhibitions will follow, perhaps with models and photographs rather than drawings. The fact that *ukiyo-e* and tattooing are progressing along such a similar trajectory, and that *ukiyo-e* and Japanese tattoos share so much imagery, indicates that tattoos should also be considered as a fine art. *Ukiyo-e* has made this transition and tattoos have the potential to follow.

**New Advancements**

In an *ArtForum* article from 1981, Marcia Tucker, contemporary curator and independent art critic, writes about the emergence of tattooing as a fine art. Artists like Mike Bakaty, Jamie Summers, and Ruth Marten are changing the field of tattooing by experimenting with new equipment and techniques. For example, they utilize single-needle tattooing which allows for more precise lines. Most machines utilize three needles for an outline and five for filling large areas of color. These artists are working beyond the typical constraints and traditions of tattooing and exploring new and innovative avenues.

All three artists are trained in fine arts and exhibit in galleries. Bakaty has extensive experience as a teacher and sculptor while both Summers and Marten have

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exhibited their paintings throughout galleries in New York.\textsuperscript{152} The three artists use abstract designs and experiment with conceptual pieces (fig. 16). They also consider that their canvas is human skin. Musculature and the aging of the skin are all considered when they tattoo a client. In fact, some of Summers’ work is so sophisticated and abstract that viewers often think they are drawn temporarily on the skin. She also uses a shading technique in which she blends subtle tones into the skin without enclosing them in lines, thus creating elegant, unusual, and abstract patterns (fig. 17).\textsuperscript{153} Tucker states, “Clearly, these artists’ work is closer in theory and practice to that of artists in other media than to the endeavors of their fellow tattooists.”\textsuperscript{154} The refined application techniques as well as the existence of pigment in almost every conceivable color as well as the changing attitudes toward tattooing have made it possible to create a tattoo out of anything that could be drawn on paper.

The article by Tucker was written in 1981, and in the twenty-seven years since that article more and more artists have emerged as true tattoo artists rather than just those who apply tattoos. Kore Flatmo is an artist who operates studios in Cincinnati, Ohio and Los Angeles, California. He is known internationally for his work and participates in conventions all over the world. In Cincinnati his work is legendary and there is a long waiting list to be tattooed by Kore. His studio operates much like a Japanese studio. He works by appointment only and collaborates with his clients to create customized tattoos.\textsuperscript{155} His specialties include portraits, Japanese images, and Christian religious work. Kore is a master at shading and often works solely in black ink, using subtle

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
  \bibitem{152} Tucker, 44.
  \bibitem{153} Tucker, 45.
  \bibitem{154} Tucker, 44.
\end{thebibliography}
shades of grey to create depth and three-dimensionality (fig. 18). However, his use of color is also exquisite. His work is vibrant and possesses a depth that few people expect from tattoos (fig. 19). Artists of this caliber are becoming more common in the United States. Television shows like Miami Ink, which first aired in 2005 on The Learning Channel, are exposing the general public to some of the great tattoo artists in the country.

The art of tattooing is truly a more complex practice than most of the public realizes. Artists are vigorously trained, there is a history of masters, and it is an evolving art form. New technology, such as more vibrant pigments, contributes to more advanced techniques. Also, many the fine arts background of many artists leads them to experiment with different ideas and abstract designs. Tattooing is no longer just a cartoonish pin-up girl on a sailor’s bicep; it has become portable art. People are no longer relegating art to their walls; they are having it permanently inked onto their bodies. This indicates a personalization of artwork in way that can never be duplicated in another medium. A portrait may depict an individual, but a tattoo is a permanent contribution to an individual’s body. The growing public acceptance of tattoos will certainly lead to more exposure for the art. I believe that the future may even bring tattoo exhibitions in gallery spaces in the form of live models and photographs. Tattooing will continue to change and so will the study of the art form.
Conclusion

Tattooing is certainly a controversial topic for many crowds. It still carries negative associations with criminal activity and a lower class identity as well as the negative connotations of biopolitics. However, contemporary tattoos have become so much more than just “mom” written on a biker’s shoulder. The complex history, training methods, and artistic sophistication of today’s tattoos place them on par with many other fine arts. Tattooing is an emerging art and the previous chapters discuss exactly why it is significant.

The tattooing tradition of Japan has a long and respected past. It began amongst the people living on the periphery of Japan, the Okinawans and the Ainu. In the middle ages tattooing was used punitively, reserved only for the worst criminals. Tattooing reached its peak in nineteenth-century Edo. Firefighters, heroes in a city constructed entirely of wood, were the first to wear full body suit tattoos and their popularity spread among the lower classes. The art in its contemporary form, known as horimono, has not deviated much from the height of its practice in the nineteenth century. Artists still work largely by hand and only use electric needles for outline work. The images used in Japanese tattoos are the same as those seen in ukiyo-e, the woodblock prints of the Edo period. The imagery of the horimono is often taken from classic Japanese iconography. There are cherry blossoms representing the temporary qualities of life, dragons to represent wisdom, and koi to symbolize stoic bravery, among many other symbols. The horimono is an enduring, yet underground, symbol of Japan. Most of the public still associates them with the yakuza, yet today more and more people, Japanese and foreign, are wearing traditional tattoos as an homage to a great art form.
In America the tattooing tradition is not as old, but it is still very much ingrained in society. The introduction of tattooing to Europe by way of Polynesia resulted in the cross-cultural exchange of imagery between native peoples and sailors. In the late nineteenth century the electric tattooing machine was invented, and it changed tattooing forever. It was no longer time consuming and thus it was no longer expensive. This was the beginning of blue-collar tattoos and also tattooed people in carnivals. Tattooing among soldiers was also very popular during both World Wars. However, after World War II there was a decline in the practice due largely to breakouts of disease and the seedy reputation of many tattoo parlors. New designs from Japan and popularity among hippies contributed to the tattoo renaissance in the 1960s. There also emerged biker tattoos, which were largely intended to intimidate others more than to decorate the body. However, it was the popularity that began in the sixties that led to the growing acceptance of tattooing by the middle class. The American tattoo is more stylistic than iconographic, but it is still a definitive and wholly American art.

Japanese and American tattoos both have long and complex histories as well as a training system for new artists. The master-apprentice system prepares artists in both countries and many American tattoo artists today also have fine arts degrees from universities. This background in fine arts creates a more sophisticated approach to tattooing than ever existed in the past. The artists have a knowledge of drawing, paintings, and color theory, among other skills. Also, both American and Japanese tattooing have masters of their art. Horiyoshi III and Don Ed Hardy are among the most respected tattoo artists in the world. Their art is considered something for others to strive
to emulate. Also, both men have worked tirelessly to promote the art and to educate the
general public about tattooing.

New artists, especially in America, are emerging with new techniques that are
changing the look and styles of tattoos. They use tools with fewer needles for finer lines
and tools with more needles for shading. Additionally, pigment manufacturers create
colors in every conceivable shade, which allow for more vibrant and more subtly shaded
tattoos than ever before. Artists are also specializing in certain kinds of tattoos, such as
portraits or Japanese style. This specialization contributes to a much higher quality tattoo
since the artist can focus on his or her strengths. All of these new developments have led
to more sophistication and experimentation in tattooing. Most of the artists who still
specialize in traditional American tattooing are those who began tattooing in the 1950s
and 1960s. They do not attempt to keep up with new styles, but they consider their
tattoos a niche. It is unclear whether this style will fade out as those artists retire or
whether it will experience a revival.

There are also more female tattoo artists practicing in America today than every
before. Most studios have at least one female artist in residence and some studios
primarily employ female artists. Another television show on the Learning Channel, titled
L.A. Ink, features a studio that is owned by a woman and employs an almost entirely
female staff. However, there are not any female artists working in the traditional
Japanese style in Japan. There are Japanese women who wear tattoos, but most of them
are the wives of tattoo artists. Certainly the world of tattooing is expanding to include
women, but it is still largely a masculine realm.
The growing popularity of tattoos is also evident in Hollywood. A lot of popular celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp, have tattoos. Johnny Depp has one tattoo that is especially infamous. While engaged to actress Winona Rider he had the words “Winona Forever” tattooed in a banner design on his bicep. However, their relationship did not last and Depp had the tattoo altered to say “Wino Forever.” In many cases a tattoo outlasts a relationship. Thus, many tattoo artists advise their clients against getting a tattoo of a lover’s name. They instead advise the individual to get a picture or design of something that reminds them of their lover.156

Tattooing is far more sophisticated than many people realize and the fact that such a large portion of the population is tattooed indicates a rising interest. Many tattoo artists today display their drawings and paintings in galleries, and it is only a matter of time before their tattoos are in galleries as well. Certainly it would be avant-garde, but tattoos are just as interesting and technically intricate as any painting. The fact that they are displayed on skin rather than canvas or paper only makes them more complex and unique among other art forms. Indeed, tattooing is on the brink of being accepted in the art world and further scholarly discussion will certainly follow.

156 DeMello, 93.
Figure 1. Japanese, Woodblock print depicting the practice of punitive *irezumi*, undated. Woodblock print ink and color on paper, dimensions unknown. Yokohama Tattoo Museum, Yokohama, Japan.
Figure 2. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Suikoden Kaoshō Rochishin*, ca. 1830-1845. Woodblock print ink and color on paper, dimensions unknown. Yokohama Tattoo Museum, Yokohama, Japan.
Figure 3. Artist Unknown, *Chrysanthemum and Dragon*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown.
Figure 4. Tools and technique for the horimono. Illustrated in Richie and Buruma, 84.
Figure 5. Harada Kohnoshin, *Full Back Piece*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown.
Figure 6. H.A. Atwell, Betty Broadbent, c. 1930s. Photograph, dimensions and location unknown.
Figure 7. Sailor Jerry Collins, *Flash Sheet*, undated. Ink on paper, dimensions and location unknown.
Figure 9. Japanese, *Traditional Japanese Full-body Suit*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown.
Figure 11. Gottfried Lindaur, *Pare Watene*, 1915. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand.
Figure 12. Samantha Fairchild, *Traditional Hawaiian tattoo on a Hula Dancer in Kauahea*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown. Photograph by Marsha Aguon.
Figure 13. Horiyoshi III, *Tiger and Dragon*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions
Figure 15. Horiyoshi III, *Kaosho Rochishin*, undated. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown.
Figure 17. Jamie Summers, *Shoulder Tattoo (Wingfeathers)*, 1981. Ink on skin, dimensions unknown.
Figure 18. Kore Flatmo, *Abraham Lincoln Portrait*, 2006. Ink on skin, dimensions and unknown.
Bibliography


