

The Skin as a Canvas: Expanding the Art History Canon with Traditional Tattoos

Julia Vickrey
Art History
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Eva Bares, ABD

Abstract

Through supporting physical evidence dating to over 5,000 years ago, tattooing stands alongside painting and sculpture as the most ancient direct expression of human creativity across the globe. Historically, tattoos have appealed to individuals for various reasons including personal tastes and social aesthetic preferences. Over the years, advances and influences within culture, fashion, politics, religion, and technology have altered the appeal, methods, and styles of tattooing. Even though tattooing has existed throughout human history, only the non-Western aspect of the art form tends to be investigated within many scholarly texts. In other words, most contemporary Western tattoos are not currently featured in art history courses. Ancient tattooing practices evolved in the Pacific Islands into styles known as the Polynesian *tatau*. Returning to their Western homelands with tattoo knowledge and artwork, explorers and sailors from the mid-1700s to the early 1900s were directly exposed to tattooing through contact with Pacific inhabitants. The geometric patterns, lines, and dots of *tatau* transformed into stylistic tattoos containing nautical imagery with bold colors and heavy outlines. Thus, tattooing evolved through the encounters of Western and non-Western cultures becoming a style commonly known today as Traditional Tattoos. This paper investigates how the Traditional Tattoo sub-genres *Sailor* and *Tribal* may be investigated within the art history canon, taking a look at how they developed while relating non-Western history to a contemporary Western perspective.

1. Introduction

The practice of tattooing emerged globally near the end of the Neolithic Period. Over thousands of years, human development has created a method which exposed Polynesian cultures to Westerners; that is water transportation. Thus Polynesian tattoos--*tatau*--were seen, obtained, and manipulated by explorers and sailors. The styles of tattooing continue to be interpreted by contemporary artists who develop new approaches to the art. Since there is a lack of scholarly information on Western tattooing as an art form, no academic term has been applied to the styles. Hence the terms "Traditional Tattoo," *Sailor*, and *Tribal* will be used in this thesis due to their general acceptance amongst tattoo artists and the tattoo community. These terms do not necessarily distinguish the art form as a part of a tradition, but are used to differentiate subject matter and style. *Sailor* tattoos have distinct characteristics that are often re-envisioned through multiple artists. Therefore, the majority of Traditional Tattoos may be interpreted as parodies or copies, questioning the authenticity of design. Today, Traditional Tattoo artists present aesthetically legitimate art that adopts and adapts the stylistic teachings of the past. Within the art history canon, tattoos are rarely discussed, unless classified as non-Western. The origin of many tattoos can be traced to non-Western cultures, however, contemporary tattoo artists often do not align with this designation. The current teachings of the art historical world do not allow for the actuality of present tattooing practices. In order for the understanding of tattoos to be more inclusive, a discussion needs to be implemented that contains a comprehensive overview pertaining to the development of contemporary Western tattoo styles. Thus, an incorporation of Traditional Tattoos within the art

historical canon can provide society with a scholarly and artistic view of contemporary tattooing practices through an understanding of tattoo history.

2. Ancient Tattoos

An introduction to tattoos begins with the prehistoric period. Archaeological digs have provided evidence of ancient cultures, such as food consumption, living conditions, and art production. The oldest preserved tattooed body found to date is “Ötzi” (Fig. 1) who was discovered in the Ötztaler Alps in 1991 and has been dated to the Neolithic Period, 5,300 year ago.¹ Ötzi bears crosses and bands of lines on various parts of his body that were created by lightly cutting the skin, then rubbing charcoal into the incisions. Over fifty markings cover his body--including the sides of the spinal column, left calf, and ankle joint--all in locations that typical body pain occurs, thus corresponds to skin acupuncture lines or points.²



Figure 1. Tattoos on the mummified remains of Ötzi.

2.1. Aesthetic Tattoos on a Pazyryk Woman

Two years after the discovery of Ötzi, Russian archaeologist Natalia Polosmak ventured into the sacred burial grounds on the remote Ukok Plateau, a region in Asia where four countries converge. Upon uncovering a mound of the Pazyryk culture, the body of a woman (Fig. 2) was discovered inside a coffin made from the sacred larch tree. The elegant tattoo markings, on her shoulder and hand, along with her elaborate burial containing material possessions and six sacrificed horses, were seen to identify her as a powerful figure and a woman of importance. Through a radiocarbon test of twenty four samples from the chamber and coffin, her body has been dated to 450 BCE.³ The woman, deemed “Siberian Princess” or “Ice Maiden” by the media, has the best preserved and most elaborate ancient tattoos found, featuring aesthetic designs similar to contemporary tattoos. The tattoos are thought to have religious significance, especially concerning the after life. It is known that the Pazyryks used tattoos as forms of identification, believing the images would assist them in finding their loved ones in another life.⁴

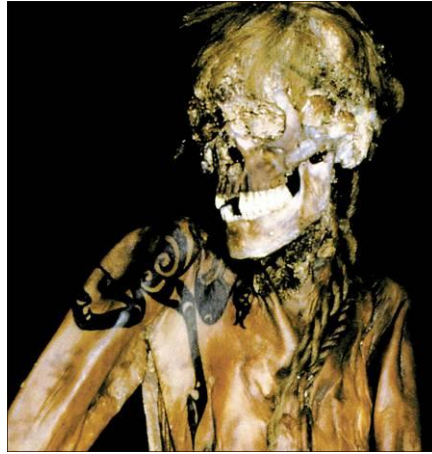


Figure 2. Preserved tattoo art showcased on the shoulder of a Pazyryk woman.

Animals have appeared in many forms of human art including prehistoric cave paintings. The Pazyryk culture used animal images as a type of language representing their thoughts concerning society and the world. The stylistic, organic physique of the animals (Fig. 3) in Pazyryks' artistic designs resemble those that adorn cave walls. The creatures appear in action poses, with twisted body composition that suggest movement and life. Heavily tattooed bodies signified a person who had lived a long life and achieved a higher position within the culture.⁵ Thus, the woman's body art further supports suggestions of her high status and relatively long life. The publicly visible locations of her tattoos--shoulder, leg, and arm--have been mirror in various cultures including Polynesian and contemporary Western societies.

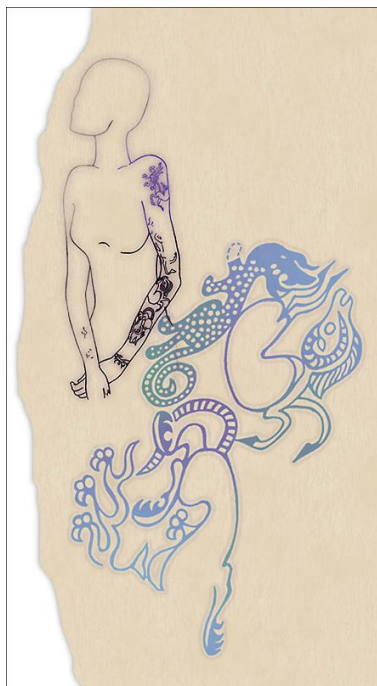


Figure 3. Reconstruction of the woman's tattoos, created by Siberian scientists.

2.2. Influence on Women from Modern Societies

Tattoos have been present on the bodies of many people from the Western world, and have continuously increase in popularity throughout the years. Many realms of early 1900s societies practiced tattooing on a widespread basis across the full spectrum of life. Women were producing Traditional Tattoo art alongside men such as Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins (1911-1973) and Charlie Wagner (1875-1953). Sailor Jerry was a prominent American tattoo artist in the 1920s-70s. Gib “Tatts” Thomas⁶ is credited as Jerry’s first formal teacher of the tattoo machine in Chicago during the 1920s. Sailor Jerry’s tattoo designs are enthusiastically collected both as tattoo designs on the skin and on consumer products such as clothing, bags, rum, key chains, and stickers. Ed Hardy, one of Jerry’s protégés, also has a massive merchandising and tattoo imagery collection that is globally collected. Charlie Wagner tattooed many known figures of the New York “freak”⁷ society. He is also well known for patenting major design improvements--vertical coils--in 1904 that created the current tattoo machine still used today.⁸

Notably, some of the first “tattooed ladies” and female tattoo artists did have personal connections with established male tattoo artists. An example of such an artist is Maud Wagner who learned the art from her husband Charlie Wagner. She is most celebrated as the first female tattooist in the United States when she began in 1911. A few other women from the era are Betty Broadbent (one of the first tattooed women), Mildred Hull (one of the first women to learn tattooing without the aid of a boyfriend/husband), and Jessie Knight (first British female tattooist, 1921). Standing beside the most recognized names previously and currently in the tattoo industry, each woman dismantle stereotypes associated with tattoos through establishing her own place within society by choosing a career within tattoo art.⁹

3. Recent History of Tattooing

Factors such as limited documentation and questionable status of human remains have contributed to the difficulty of providing a scholarly tattoo history. The body of the Pazyryk woman has gone through international ownership debate concerning whether archaeologists had been working without authorization from the local authorities, while ethical questions arose surrounding ownership of her body and her removal from sacred lands. While few past scholars have shown interest in the Western aspect of tattooing, today particular scholars such as Anna Felicity Friedman (tattoo historian, interdisciplinary scholar, and professor), Matt Lodder (heavily tattooed art historian), Margot Mifflin (author, journalist, and professor), and Amelia Klem Osterud (heavily tattooed academic librarian) are working diligently on collecting, providing, and publishing scholarly information concerning tattoo history. Certainly as a result of the lack of scholarship on tattooing in the West, the focus within the art history classroom is by default on non-Western tattooing, with only a few sentences, if any, said about contemporary versions of the art form anywhere else in the world.

Nevertheless, tattoos and tattooing have made their way into the classroom. Various university courses that do include “tattoos” in the curriculum include archeology, dance, history, dermatology, women’s studies, special topic, minority affairs, diversity, law, and Oceanic art. One book required for a typical Art History course, *Oceanic Art*, contains a chapter entitled “The Art of the Body,” dedicated to tattoos. Whereas in another required book, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia & Micronesia*, contains a chapter entitled “Adorning the Adorned” which includes the discussion of tattoos alongside clothing, fashion, and ornaments. Both of these are examples within scholarly art historical books, and it must be pointed out that professors and teachers often include articles outside the required text, in order to enhance the learning experience for the particular subject of choice. While the practice of tattooing originated within the “non-Western” and “Oceanic” areas of the art history canon, information beyond those beginning developments lacks drastically. In order to develop a full comprehension of contemporary tattoos, the expansion and adoption of the art form into Western society can be traced.

3.1. Possible Origins of the term “Tattoo”

The word “tattoo” first appeared in *Voyage autour du monde*, published in 1771, by French navigator Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811). He used “tattoo” to describe the body decoration of the Tahitian natives. According to Oxford Art Online, the term “tattoo” applies to “the practice of irreversibly marking the skin by puncturing the

dermis and inserting an indelible pigment.”¹⁰ The Polynesian word *tatau*, which means to "puncture, mark made on skin," has been regarded as the origin of the English word "tattoo." The Polynesian *tatau* (variations: *tatoa*, *ta-tatau*, and *tatu*) was widespread throughout the islands, amongst both men and women. An existing issue with establishing a historic timeline relies on distinguishing factual information verses inflated or created achievements of early explorers.¹¹ With that said, Captain James Cook (1728-79) has been credited with introducing "tattoo," as a word and an art form, into Western culture upon his return from his first voyage in the Pacific (1768-71). The men who accompanied Cook, as well as other early European visitors of the South Seas, were among the first Europeans to witness and acquire Polynesian *tatau* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This moment marked the initial spread of tattoos in popularity among British seamen and the marginalized underclass in Europe. An example of one such man is English Sailor Barnet Burns (1805-60) (Fig. 4) who was a "Pākehā-Māori," which was a nineteenth century term for Europeans who chose to live among Māori of New Zealand. Men such as Burns became negotiators between Europeans and the Māori, developing communication and trade between the two cultures. Burns fully adopted the Māori culture, which included marrying into families and receiving facial moko tattoos.¹²



Figure 4. Portrait of Barnet Burns, an Englishman tattooed by the Māori of New Zealand, 1840s, image in Barnet Burns' book.

The genre of Traditional *Tribal* Tattoos originally was inspired by South Pacific *tatau* and moko designs. Hawaiian tattoo artist Bong produces contemporary renditions of *tatau* (Fig. 5).¹³ The artist does not appear to classify his art as "tribal," but within the Western tattoo community, it would be commonly accepted as so. The term *Tribal* has been adopted by contemporary society to describe a particular style of tattoos within Western culture that mimics the art style of Pacific cultural. The original designs that stem from Polynesian communities (who independently developed their own art forms, rituals, and technologies) were associated with particular belief systems, while simultaneously being an expression of identity and culture. Traditional *Tribal* Tattoos generally contain no cultural significance in relation to the non-Western realm, but rather have developed meaning alongside the art form, varying for each individual choosing to obtain the particular style. By removing it from the place of origin, the contemporary *Tribal* tattoos genre has emerged using a problematic term possibly as a result of knowledge lacking within society and the tattoo community. Even so, tattoo artists across the world are creating specific designs upon request in the *Tribal* style, typically resulting in a unique tattoo for each of their clients.



Figure 5. Tattoo By Bong, 2013, Honolulu, Hawaii; known on Instagram as bong_tatau.

3.2. Tattoo History within Current Art History Canon

The origin of tattoos cannot be credited to any particular place or culture due to the fact that tattooing, in various forms, emerged in numerous locations over 5,000 years ago. For most of these cultures written records do not exist, rather, information has been preserved and passed on through verbal and visual communication. Depending on the geographical location, the *tatau* signified group association, social identity, special events, and pain tolerance.¹⁴ Designs of *tatau* were personalized for each individual, just as contemporary tattoos are created for people today. Polynesian *tatau* may have been talismans to ward off evil, while also representing affiliation during times of war. Other designs were primarily used for aesthetic reasons only--to appear more attractive.¹⁵ The Polynesian aesthetic of the body was closely linked to identity and social status and in this regard are similar to the Pazyryks people.

In Micronesia, specifically the Marshall Islands, tattooing was believed to have been given by the gods as a way to enhance personal beauty, therefore it has been performed with aesthetic intent. The tattooer required complete silence to create the design and the extent of beauty depended on the size of payment. Marshallese tattoo consists of straight and zigzag lines. The long and painful process involved a tattooing chisel made from fish or bird bones which was dipped in a dye of coconut sheaths and water. The tattooer then struck the chisel with a mallet, constructed out of coconut leaf or wood, in order to insert the dye into the skin. As a part of social and economic life of the Marshallese, tattoos were received by all members of the community, while also indicating social status and decorative design.¹⁶

Within the Māori culture of New Zealand, the word *tatau* was used to describe adornment performed through pricking or cutting the skin and applying color. In the particular style of Moko tattooing which can be seen in figure 4, a scalpel-sharp chisel is used to cut and gouge the skin creating a raised scarred pattern placed on the face.¹⁷ Typical *tatau* locations for women are the lip and chin and for men cheeks and forehead as well as between the waist and legs. Elements of Māori culture *tapu/noa* meaning life/death are reflected on the body within divided “zones” which are then broken down to smaller sections. Within each section, an asymmetrical pattern consisting of lines and geometric shapes are fit into each space in order to create an overall symmetry of design on the body.¹⁸

3.3. Tattoo History Beyond the Art History Canon

The art of *tatau* thrived until European explorers arrived in the eighteenth century when missionaries attempted to remove all aspects of Polynesian religion. They destroyed places of worship and denounced spiritual deities. The attempt to repress the artistic expression of tattooing was due to the associations of the art with the Polynesian religions. “Christian doctrine shuns tattooing and views it as a form of mutilation, thereby, harming the body that God gave.”¹⁹ While many Polynesian communities retained customary practices, social organization, and political structures, the general knowledge of *tatau* appeared to disappear.

Tatau could not be completely erased from human creativity, memory, or history however. Several individuals have conserved the art and customs throughout the years. *Tatau* knowledge was preserved and practiced throughout

the repression. In 1972, some Cook Islands enthusiasts wanted to make *tatau* available to all people of the Pacific and spread knowledge about the art. The Cook Islands, located in the South Pacific ocean, comprise fifteen small islands located between Hawaii and New Zealand.²⁰ Through their efforts, the South Pacific Festival of the Arts was created.²¹ Held in various locations in the Pacific every four years since, the festival has generated exposure to longstanding arts and culture of the South Pacific that could possibly disappear otherwise. While encouraging the preservation of indigenous art, the festival brought tattooing back into the minds of the people.²²

4. Formation of Contemporary Tattooing as Legitimate Art

Appropriating ideas from the past and recreating them in the present is not a new practice within the creative realm. In the world of art, students study the works of the masters in order to learn and discover ways of expressing themselves on canvas. For the tattoo artist, the skin is that canvas. Many tattoo artists have gone through conventional art training or schooling. Some possess degrees in painting or drawing, and all professional tattoo artists have a certification for tattooing achieved through apprenticeships and continuous practice over a number of years.²³ Tattooing is a unique form of art because it is one that is regulated. Each artist has to abide by rules and regulations for the city they work in and apply for a tattooing permit through the local health department. Environmental Health Services inspect tattoo parlors, following similar guidelines as those existing for daycares, hotels, and swimming pools.²⁴

The concept that society possesses about tattoos has continuously changed throughout history. This is especially true in the United States and Europe and can be attributed to influences from various realms such as cultural affiliation, media, and religion. Westerners synthesized the Polynesian art style into their own cultural expression. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tattoos were a fad amongst specific social groups, such as sailors, soldiers, Victorian high society, and “freaks.”²⁵ After the invention of the electric tattoo machine--on December 8, 1891 by Samuel O'Reilly²⁶--and the end of World War I, the association of tattoos with the deviant became commonplace. Affiliations with military personnel, gangs, bikers, and prisoners gave tattoos a sense of “tough” or “bad guy” associations, further pushing the impression of the deviant. A deviant individual is thought to participate in a lifestyle that differs from accepted social standards, that is, he/she would engage in sexual or illegal actions or activities. A commonly accepted opinion amongst society generates the general interpretation of considering an act, idea, or image as inappropriate.²⁷ Moreover, it was believed that the act of getting a tattoo would result in the person becoming deviant. Interestingly, the deviant connotations associated with tattoos, while still present in contemporary society, are starting to become obsolete.

4.1. Legitimation Techniques

Tattooing is unique from other forms of art. The placement of permanent markings on one's skin, therefore causing pain to oneself in order to gain art can easily be questioned. Due to the permanent and visible nature of tattoos, the public and private realms of the art are explored through social interactions. In order for the deviant associations to completely melt away in contemporary society, tattooing can be destigmatized through a set of “legitimation techniques” which have been proposed by scholar Katherine Irwin. These techniques are a way to change social definitions through the act of face to face interactions of tattooees and non-tattooees and can be seen as a contributor to the legitimacy of tattoos since the 1990s. “Tattooee” generally includes any person who has a tattoo.²⁸ Everyday interactions, a part of the “legitimation techniques,” create opportunities for a wider acceptance of a tattoo culture and allows tattooees to maximize possible benefits while minimizing the negative through changing the meanings associated with tattoos.

Irwin gained a sense of an understanding of the motivations and fears of the people wanting tattoos during her study conducted at Blue Mosque tattoo shop located in the western United States. Many individuals debating on receiving a tattoo fear negative perceptions associated with the art, including acceptability in conventional society, financial loss, threatened future opportunities, and rejection by people they love. Motivations from contemporary Western individuals receiving tattoos range from a childhood desire, influence of others, providing an identity, rites of passage, empowerment, decoration, and symbolism. Contemporary motivations curiously resemble those of the Polynesian cultures and early twentieth century Western tattooing in regards to empowerment, memorial, protection, and religious reasoning behind the design.

“Legitimation techniques” are showcased through tattooees' ability to maintain a conventional functional lifestyle, including a stable career, family and/or school environment, while also displaying smart choices such as finding professional tattoo artists and clean shops. Tattooees are people who decide to either show, or conceal, pieces of art they have chosen to painstakingly receive. The success of “legitimation techniques” can be seen as social norms shift toward subsiding deviant perceptions of tattoos. Furthermore, scholar Derek John Roberts has suggested that a “social transformation”—a redefinition of tattoo that now sees it as part of the mainstream—is in the process of emerging.²⁹ The result of “legitimation techniques” working within the social transformation is tattoo acceptance in the workplace.

4.2. Globalization/Westernization

Globalization has also aided in changing society's perception of tattoos. The term “globalization” has been used to describe the increase in international integration which arose from the travel of humans around the world allowing for the exchanges of culture, life, ideas, products, and worldviews. While the world becomes increasingly connected through advances in technology, the rituals and practices of remote places have become more integrated into the common perception of the world. Through multiple various encounters with foreign ideas, people are able to begin to see the ideas or images as a part of everyday life. This process allows for new meaning to emerge for the artwork in the minds of each individual. The sailors who adopted the Polynesian *tatau* are a prime example of that process in use. They paved the path for the Traditional Tattoo style to be exposed to all levels of society, thus allowing for wider acceptance in contemporary times.

By 1970, many original “Old-School” pioneers were disappearing from the tattooing scene, as many of them grew into old age or passed away. The remaining “Old-School” enthusiasts preserved the art style by passing knowledge on to younger artists.³⁰ One of those enthusiasts was Sailor Jerry who mentored protégés such as Ed Hardy and Mike Malone. In the 1970s, the feminist movement claimed tattoos as their own, giving the art form a new definition within modern society.³¹ In the 1980s, cosmetic surgery was increasingly popular, with body art³² mirroring the rise. Also during the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, tattoos took on new meaning through the introduction of emerging counterculture and popular media.³³ Mainstream entertainment placed celebrities who had visible tattoos and other modifications onto televisions across countries such as the United States, allowing for a growth in popularity amongst the younger generation.³⁴

5. Significance of Traditional Tattoos and Tattoo Artists

The design choice of a tattoo would seem to be the most important decision for the potential tattooee. Their interest in design selection suggests that artistic expression stands as an integral part of the tattoo process.³⁵ Some tattooees aim to utilize artwork through discretion in themes and locations while others want large, visible, works of art that display the artists' ability to create fine art.³⁶ The tattoo selection process shows that tattoos are serious investments which require thought as opposed to quick, last minute decisions.³⁷ Consequently, each tattoo provides the individuals with a unique work of art of their own choosing.

Clients, who begin as potential tattooees, pay the tattoo artist to create a work of art for them. Usually the client comes to the artist with a general idea to present and requests the creation of a design. The encounter can be compared to historical accounts of individuals hiring artists to create works of art for them; for example, the Medici as a Renaissance patron to Leonardo da Vinci. A hired artist presents an individual style which can add unique characteristics. The artist then produces an original work to be placed on the client's skin. The word “original” has been used because the skin as a canvas is a living organ, varying for each person. Even so, is the design truly original when the work many people choose is actually a copy of a trademarked design from flash art³⁸ containing Traditional Tattoo designs such as *Sailor* motifs (fig. 6) or a *Tribal* design similar to Polynesian *tatau*?



Figure 6. Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins *Sailor Jerry Flash Sheet 7m*, 10x14 in, ink and watercolor on D’arches paper. Currently can be purchased online through vintagetattoooflash.com for \$5,000.00.

5.1. Traditional *Sailor* Tattoos

The genre of Traditional *Sailor* Tattoo--also referred to as “Americana,” “Vintage,” and “Old-School,”--is represented by Figures 6 through 11. Tattoo artist Sailor Jerry is a staple of the *Sailor* style due to his achievements within the tattooing industry, creating international recognition of his brand. The distinct style of Sailor Jerry has been enthusiastically collected commercially and privately worldwide leading to signed and dated flash sheets becoming scarce. *Sailor* style tattoos derive directly from early prominent Western tattoo artists, especially Sailor Jerry. Many designs credited to Sailor Jerry for introducing to the industry have been, and continue to be, altered and interpreted by tattoo artists and tattooees essentially creating the Traditional *Sailor* style. *Sailor* tattoos often consist of nautical imagery such as anchors, banners, cartoons, flowers, hearts with names, nautical stars, pinup girls, ships, and skulls. Animals such as bluebirds, eagles, snakes, sparrows, and tigers also appear. Bold designs consisting of saturated colors and distinguished shading further signify the *Sailor* style.³⁹ The ideas of the designs originated on the men who had fought the mighty seas and battled the raging winds of the Pacific Ocean, beginning with the age of exploration.



Figure 7. Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins *Cobra and Geisha Tattoo Flash Sheet 4 R*

Typically, tattoo artists use something called “flash sheets” to draw original tattoo designs that are used as “sales aids.”⁴⁰ The walls of many tattoo shops have flash art to assist tattoo artists and potential tattooees to either gain inspiration or to create a copy of a tattoo design. Many tattoo artists today continue to create their own flash sheets,

placing them for sale online, in shops, and at conventions. Anyone can purchase these, making sheets from particularly popular artists valuable while also allowing individuals who may not want a permanent tattoo an opportunity to own a piece of artwork from that artist. Flash can be drawn on any type of paper, but is often on a good grade of watercolor paper. Methods and materials vary for each artist, but often basic designs are outlined with a pen (sometimes India ink) and generally shaded with a technique called "spit shading"⁴¹ that creates the dark to light gradation. The design is finished with watercolors.



Today, the *Sailor* style offers designs for all people. Every day, men and women who have no affiliation with the military or the Pacific Ocean receive Traditional *Sailor* Tattoos. Even though Traditional *Sailor* Tattoos are often based on flash art, there are original artists who create their own imagery through their interpretations of the historical works. The app Instagram⁴³ provides many examples of contemporary Traditional Tattoos through the personal and business accounts of tattoo artists. Examples of three such artists (narrowed down from the vast amount of users through style and location) are North Carolina artists Josh McDowell (Fig. 8), Kurt Gardiner (Fig. 9), and Danny Reed (Fig. 10). Each artist specializes in creating original tattoo designs, often in the Traditional *Sailor* style. McDowell works at Invidia Tattoo in Asheville, North Carolina, Gardiner is a traveling tattoo artist with one main location in Asheville, while Reed tattoos at Hot Stuff Tattoo in Asheville. The style of each artist can be classified as Traditional, while influential characteristics of particular “Old-School” tattoo designs are present. Anchors, ships, and animal designs intersect scandalously dressed women, sharp bold colors, and geometric flower patterns creating visually striking works of art to showcase their artistic capabilities.



Figure 9. Kurt Gardiner *Original watercolor painting*, 2012, 11x17 in, prints are currently sold for \$30-45.

5.1.1. Pinup

Pinup imagery increased during the Second World War, driven by the United States Government barring young men from enlisting in the Navy if they had a tattoo of a naked lady on their body. Tattoo artists, such as Charlie Wagner, began the art of the “cover-up,” adding clothing to the once naked women to conform to United States military standards. Pinup art began to be produced of clothed women, yet many appeared more sexual than their previous naked counterparts.⁴⁴ Tattoo artists continue today to add specific elements of shading to enhance certain aspects, especially curves, of the female figure. When one compares figures 7 and 8, many similarities appear such as the subject matter and stance of the woman with the flag. She holds a flag that resembles an American flag in color and pattern, but it drapes across her body with a snake-like flow. Both artist gave the flag a two pointed tip, mirroring the tongue of the snake pattern seen on both flash sheets as well as other *Sailor* style snake designs. The influential bold colors and heavy outline presented by Sailor Jerry is reflected within McDowell's work.⁴⁵



Figure 10. Danny Reed *Appalachian Hula Girl*, 2012.

Contemporary tattoo artists Gardiner and Reed both have chosen to incorporate features other than clothing to cover the breasts of the women. The lady on bottom left of figure 9 appears clothed upon first glance, yet only has braids to cover her chest. The specific style and angle of her foot, in the yellow heel, can be seen within many “Old-School” pioneers, especially Sailor Jerry. Reed also uses the Traditional pin-up as the base model for his design in *Appalachian Hula Girl* (Fig. 10).⁴⁶ He has included local fauna--tobacco leaves, blackberry branches, and laurel flowers--with a particularly famous “naked hula girl”⁴⁷ motif. She made her initial appearance on flash sheets from

Sailor Jerry, such as in *Flash Sheet 6v* (Fig.11). Each hula girl has distinguishable features such as flowing blonde hair, pointed leaf skirt, and dense flower lei casually draped over her breasts. They both appear to be in motion, suggestively dancing the Hula from the Hawaiian Islands.



Figure 11. Norman "Sailor Jerry" Collins *Flash Sheet 6v*, Currently can be purchased online through vintagetattooflash.com for \$5,000.00.

5.2. Traditional *Tribal* Tattoos

Many Traditional Tattoos showcase cultural ideas developed within particular groups of people. The tattoos of indigenous people, for example, may express spiritual or magical beliefs and convictions, or indicate one's affiliation, status, or love for another.⁴⁸ Moreover, ancient techniques and symbols are often copied, adopted, and changed over time in order to agree with or influence modern perceptions. Through a new perspective, old customs are revitalized in today's society. One such example is the contemporary genre of Traditional *Tribal* Tattoos which allows the tattooees to chose when, where, and how the tattoo will be applied to their skin, in opposition to some historical accounts from indigenous rituals requiring particular actions, such as tattooing, to be perform on their people.⁴⁹

Before the modern tattoo machine, the application of a tattoo was a sacred practice or ritual accomplished through an extremely painful and long process which held a high risk of infection. Within the Māori culture, moko tattooing--tattoos on the face and body--are interpreted as ideas of identity and status. The Māori created personalized designs and reserved facial tattoos for the most important members of their group. Over time, the personalized designs evolved and varied throughout areas.⁵⁰ Today, the young adults of contemporary New Zealand are more likely to receive a tattoo from a modern tattooing machine rather than the application process their ancestors experienced during moko tattooing. Even so, they are continuing the cultural identity of becoming marked with ink as "a shift from childhood into early adolescence."⁵¹ Thus, the New Zealander practices have evolved through globalization by adopting Western machines to create more precise designs and cause less pain to the tattoo recipient than Māori tools.

While the genre of *Tribal* Tattoos resembles the markings of indigenous people, in terms of simple yet intricate design, (which are often void of color and involving lines) contemporary *Tribal* Tattoos typically lack any non-Western cultural significance. If such tattoos were to contain any particular significance, then those designs would most likely be considered Polynesian *tatau*. An example of such a tattoo artist is Bong who associates his tattoo work with *tatau*, Hawaii, island, and Polynesian tattoo.⁵²

5.3. Contemporary *Tatau*

According to the authors of "The Lost Connections: Tattoo Revival in the Cook Islands," tattoo artists from the Cook Islands in the South Pacific have now become interested in *tatau*, such as Mike Tavioni, Tetini Pekepo, and

Boye Nichols.⁵³ These men have each learned and practiced the contemporary and ancestral forms of tattooing, but have differing views of how to approach the art. While Tavioni believes that *tatau* should remain strictly in accordance with established practice, Pekepo uses his knowledge to reinterpret cultural motifs as customized images for each client. Nichols, on the other hand, experienced a lifestyle similar to his ancestors by joining the Cook Island Ocean Voyaging Society. He participated in a personal journey of self-discovery through canoe voyage where he learned about the people and cultures of the surrounding islands. Each destination presented new ideas and people, which led to more tattoos and friends.⁵⁴ Similar to his own ancestors and the European sailors, Nichols used his personal experience and connections to enhance his style of tattoo art. On the contrary, as a contemporary tattoo artist Nichols uses modern tattooing machines to perform his art on his clientele. The machine allows the tattoo artist to work more efficiently while also creating intricate designs.

6. Technique and Equipment

As a form of invasive practice, tattooing demonstrates permanent modifications through soft tissue alterations of the human skin.⁵⁵ Tattooing, a body decoration, is an evolving art continually changing through technology that allows for more precise equipment and ink containing vivid colors. In 1891, O'Reilly modified a part of Thomas A. Edison's document duplication system (1876) into a tattoo machine. O'Reilly's apprentice Charlie Wagner improved it in 1904.⁵⁶ While being the first successful cosmetic tattooist, Wagner created the dual-coil tattoo machine that remains practically unaltered today. His machine allowed for tattoos to become affordable for the working class. Due to Western technologies, Polynesian etching and tapping techniques were enhanced. Today, there are different types of tattooing machines for outlining, shading, and filling in tattoos.⁵⁷ Also, different brands of ink provide a variety of color options which allow for the creation of visually striking imagery. The tattoo artists' machines and inks are comparable to painter's various brushes and paints.⁵⁸

Besides the worry of a mistake in design, the questioning of implications caused by the changing of skin elasticity and volume in tattooed areas remains present in the minds of society. Foreseeable and unpredictable life events can affect the way skin appears such as accidents, aging, pregnancy, and sun exposure. The ability for tattoo removal has provided a few options for people to "remove" the ink from their skin. While typically tattoos are permanent, an image deemed worthy of placement on skin can now be altered and almost erased depending on the color, location, and quantity of ink present in the skin. Currently black and red ink provide the best results, while pastel or "in between" colors have varying results, and yellowish-orange hues do not respond to any current lasers.⁵⁹ Forms of tattoo removal have included chemical, laser, mechanical, physical, and surgical methods. Dermabrasion, performed by a doctor is a process in which the rubbing away of the upper to mid-layers of skin occurs using abrasive devices such as sandpaper, salt, or a wire brush. Similar to dermabrasion, salabrasion is the scrubbing of salt on the skin. TCA, or Trichloroacetic acid, was used to remove the layers of skin that contain tattoo ink. Skin grafts can also be used after the tattooed area has been cut out. Another option for an unwanted tattoo is to get a "cover up," which literally means the person will have another image tattooed over their existing tattoo. Many tattooees experience changes in their lives that may affect their own opinions about their tattoos and the technique of the cover up becomes an art within itself.

The most effective method of tattoo removal appeared commercially in the early 1990s in the form of advances in laser technologies. The non-invasive removal of tattoo pigments using Q-switched lasers allow for the "elimination" of any unwanted tattoo. While the concept of removal may sound like a good idea, it does contain cons that include much more pain and time than the original tattoo required. Q-switched laser technologies, such as YAG lasers, transfer large amounts of energy into the tissue where the tattoo is located in order to break down the ink pigment into small particles. The lasers are designed to avoid creating scar tissue.⁶⁰

As therapeutic purposes may have been the reasoning behind Ötzi's tattoos, the importance of tattooing as a form of pain relief can arguably be as important as art for the individual, historically and currently. A physical cover-up of the pain emerges through ink and blood. One example can be seen through some mastectomy patients choosing to receive artistic tattoos in the place of their breast(s), boosting their self esteem through visually striking imagery. Some choose to have elaborate and colorful designs in the place of their breasts.⁶¹ Others can receive a tattoo of a nipple, shaded with such precision that only by touch can one tell the difference between a real nipple and the art. Tattoo artist Vinnie Myers specializes in Nipple Areola Tattooing as a part of reconstructive/cosmetic tattooing.

7. Conclusion

Expanding the art historical canon to include Traditional Tattoos would create a more comprehensive overview of the art form. Current teachings within the discipline typically lacks any contemporary tattoo designs or technologies, resulting in misrepresented terminology and misunderstood depictions. The future development of tattooing will continue to progress in machinery, techniques, and designs, while also remaining publicly available and visible. While it is certain that all divisions of society will not accept or acquire tattoos, even as an existing historical art form, new opinions and scholarship constantly emerges through a greater understanding of tattoo art. Tattoos warrant exposed as a highly respectable form of historically legitimate art within a scholarly format, the art history canon. Not only are the non-Western aspects vital to tattoo history, but also are the Western pioneering and contemporary tattoo artists, as well as the various techniques of applications and removal. Thus, an inclusion of multiple cultural histories combined with modern knowledge establishes the foundation of Traditional Tattoos within society of today.

8. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express her appreciation to the professors and fellow students who provided feedback and encouragement throughout the development of this paper.

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 - 4 The Pazyryks believed they would go to a mountain pasture after they died. Ibid.
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 - 6 Thomas' birth and death dates currently appear to be unknown, but evidence suggests he was active throughout the 1910s-1960s, "Gibs 'Tatts' Thomas," *Tattoo Archive*, http://www.tattooarchive.com/tattoo_history/thomas_tatts.html.
 - 7 "Freaks" refers to people associated with sideshow performances of the early 1900s.
 - 8 Carol Clerk, *Vintage Tattoos: The Book of Old-School Skin Art*, New York: Universe Publishing (2009), 44.
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 - 14 Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts*, 114.
 - 15 Phillippe Bourgoin, "French Courts Rule Against the Repatriation of a Māori Head to New Zealand," *Tribal* 12, no. 4 (2008): 143.
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20 *Cook Islands*, <http://www.cookislands.travel/usa>.

21 Currently, tattoo conventions and festivals are common internationally. They allow for the spread of artistic ideas through emerging creativity and exposure of tattoo artists. People attend to share the art of tattooing with each other, some receive or create tattoos while many admire the works on others. Booths are typically rented at these events for tattoo shops, tattoo artists, and product vendors.

22 Mangos, "The Lost Connections," 320.

23 Fedorenko, "A Body of Work," 106.

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25 Margot Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo, Third Edition* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2013), 31.

26 Karen L. Hudson, *Living Canvas*, (Berkeley, California: Seal Press, 2009), 9. Also, see the Technique and Equipment section for more information about O'Reilly.

27 Katherine Irwin, "Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction," *Symbolic Interaction* 24, no. 1 (2001): 50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/si.2001.24.1.49>.

28 Irwin, "Legitimizing," 51.

28 Derek John Roberts, "Secret Ink: Tattoo's Place in Contemporary American Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 2, (2012): 153-165, EBSCOhost.

30 Clerk, *Vintage Tattoo*, 236-237.

31 Margot Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion*, 54.

32 Body art refers to art made on the human body and includes forms such as tattoos, permanent make-up, piercings, scarification, painting, and subdermal implants.

33 Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion*, 72.

34 Irwin, "Legitimizing," 50.

35 Fedorenko, "A Body of Work," 114.

36 Irwin, "Legitimizing," 66.

37 Roberts, "Secret Ink," 155.

38 Flash art, also known as flash sheets, is art on paper often seen as stereotypical images of popular tattoo designs.

39 Clerk, *Vintage Tattoos*, 86. "Bold will hold" is a common statement within the tattoo industry referring to the efficient application and lasting qualities of the bold colors and heavy outlines characteristic of *Sailor* style tattoos.

40 Historically, some tattoo artists also have "books of designs" that contain their personal artistic creations for clientele to view.

41 The artist places black ink onto an area of the (wet or dry) paper with one brush. Then another brush dipped in water (then put in mouth to draw out some of the water giving the name to the process) is placed in the wet black ink and slowly is moved across in a tight zigzag, never lifting up until the fade the artist desires is achieved.

42 *Ibid.*, 56.

43 App is short for application software (or application) which is "a self-contained program or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose," defined by Oxford Dictionaries. With a square format size and various filters, Instagram is an app for people to upload their own photos while also viewing other users' uploaded photos. Instagram is an app that can be downloaded for free through Google play and the AppStore and is used on mobile devices. <http://instagram.com/>

44 Clerk, *Vintage Tattoos*, 126-127.

45 Ships and anchors--top right image in McDowell's work--are also a common nautical theme throughout *Sailor* tattoos.

46 <http://dannyreedtattoo.com/page/11/>.

47 Clerk, *Vintage Tattoos*, 119.

48 Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 16.

49 *Ibid.*, 33.

50 Bourgoïn, "French Courts."

51 Awekotuku, "Māori Tribal Tattoo," 3.

52 Bong places hashtags on many of his uploaded photos on Instagram. The following are typical of each photo of his tattoo work #tatau #tattoosbybong #tattoobong #tattoo #tattoos #tattooed #poly #polyswag #polynesian

#polynesiantattoo #hawaii #hawaiiartist #ink #inked #islandink #islandtattoo. Hastags are placed in the comment section of each picture as a way for users to search key terms across the site.

53 Mangos, "The Lost Connections," 321.

54 Ibid., 323, 327-331.

55 Camphausen, *Return of the Tribal*, 18.

56 Hudson, *Living Canvas*, 9.

57 Tattoo machines are sometimes referred to as "guns" which is a term considered incorrect by most people in the tattoo industry.

58 Fedorenko, "A Body of Work," 108.

59 <http://www.cosmeticsurgeryofasheville.com/common-questions/laser-tattoo-removal/>.

60 B. Z. Akad, C. Demirdover, M. Gorgu and S. Irkoren, "The Q-Switched Nd: YAG Laser in Tattoo Removal and the Effect of Lymphatic Elimination: An Experimental Study in Rabbits," *Surgical Science* 2 (2011): 262-268, EBSCOhost.

61 Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion*, 87-90.