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Tattoo You

The art of tattooing is becoming a living artform as many cultures consider its significant aspects

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Tattoos.

Many of us envision them on drunken sailors staggering out of sleazy tattoo parlors.

But how many of us see tattoos as a living art form?

Dr. Norman Goldstein, a Honolulu dermatologist and professor of dermatology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, sees beauty in tattoos.

Internationally known as the "tattoo guru," Goldstein has had an avid interest in tattoos for more than 29 years. He studies all aspects of tattooing—from its history to its medical complications to its fascination among cultures.

Goldstein's interest has led to a collection of more than 7,000 photographs of tattoos, which range from genital tattoos to total-body tattoos.

"I get about three to five photographs of tattoos in the mail every week from photographers, dermatologists, plastic surgeons and tattoo artists around the world."

is, the higher he or she is in the royal hierarchy.

Although most cultures have similar methods of tattooing, there are some cultures that practice unique methods.

"Eskimo tattooing is very, very unique," he said. Although most tattooing is done by jabbing an instrument into the skin, the Eskimos take a needle and thread dipped in carbon and run it horizontally under the skin.

Africans practice tattooing by scarring the skin. They prick the skin and take a grain of sand, rubbing it into the skin to create a raised scar.

Most modern tattoo parlors use an electrical stainless steel instrument under sterile conditions, and AIDS has not yet been linked to tattooing.

"I've been in touch with the CDC (the Communicable Disease Center) and keep in touch with them almost on a weekly basis," Goldstein said. "It's possible, but so far we have not seen one case of AIDS."

"Tattoo artists are not supposed to tattoo people who are stoned, drunk or in any way illegal," he said. "Most tattoo artists today watch the laws very carefully, but there are some people

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he said, "I've stopped counting at 7,000."

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He said the Egyptians and even the Hawaiians practiced tattooing. The word tattooing comes from the Polynesian word "tatau," which means tattoo.

Many cultures practice the art of tattooing to this day. Tattoos have their own origins and significance in each culture.

The Japanese, for example, began tattooing as a form of protection against their superstitions. Now, tattooing is done for ornamentation, and many tattoo clubs exist in Japan.

"Japanese tattooing is the nicest," Goldstein said. "because they're large, they're very delicate, very artistic."

In Samoan culture, tattoos are usually applied on the trunk of the body, presenting legend and story in heavy pigment.

Goldstein added that each motif is culturally significant. The more tattooed the Samoan

who unfortunately don't."

Some states and counties have prohibited tattooing, and other states have standard regulations that must be met. Hawaii residents must be over the age of 18 or have parental or guardian consent.

However, Goldstein added that although most modern tattooing methods are sterile, some rare complications occur, including impetigo, syphilis, tetanus, keloids and warts.

Another complication that exists especially in Hawaii, where sunlight is strong, is a photoallergic reaction to a certain mixture of dyes. Goldstein has shown through research that a mixture of chemicals in the red and yellow dyes can create such problems as severe itching.

People remove tattoos for various reasons.
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photo courtesy of Norman Goldstein

Top right: A tattoo mural on a woman's back.

Bottom right: A sculpture of a Japanese woman being tattooed.

Tattoos

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ious reasons, among them medical complications, personal changes, the inability to obtain employment and shame.

Generally, many tattoo artists won't remove tattoos for legal reasons, and in many states the law prohibits tattoo artists from removing tattoos.

Tattoos can be removed by acids, lasers and a home remedy of salt that is applied to gauze and rubbed against the skin.

"I always tell people that no matter how the tattoo is removed, there is always some type of scar," Goldstein said. "It's never going to be perfect."

The removal of tattoos can also result in such medical complications as keloids, which are unusually large scars.

Despite these rare complications, Goldstein said, many people of diverse ethnic back-

grounds and social-economical classes tattoo themselves for different reasons.

A popular form of tattooing involves cosmetic improvements. A popular form in Hawaii is lash augmentation, which is called many things, such as "eye enhancement" and "permalid liner." Cosmetic tattooing is also used to color white spots in dark skin.

Goldstein said people are very creative with tattoos and place them on belly buttons, foreheads and genital areas.

Marijuana tattoos are very popular. Goldstein has more than 300 of them in his collection of tattoos.

Goldstein said people often ask him if they should get a tattoo.

"I say, 'Hey, you want a tattoo, get a tattoo, but no names. Relationships change, spouses change, somebody dies, somebody moves away. So you want to get a tattoo? Fine.'"



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