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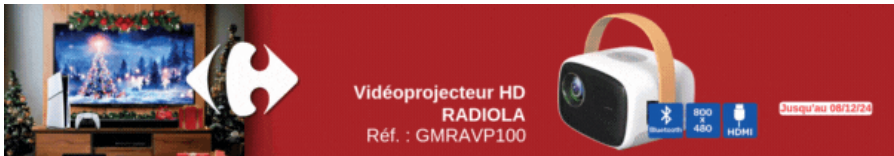
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## Heipuanui, tattoo artist: "The Tahitian style is really rare"



Photo credit: Thibault Segalard.



inspirations. Interview.

**"Among all the artists present at this convention, your tattoo style seems to stand out for its unique and singular identity. How would you define your style?"**

I do not practice Patutiki, which is Marquesan tattooing, even if I can do it occasionally, depending on the request of certain clients. My style is Tahitian tattooing, and I am very attached to it. Today, for example, I spent the day tattooing my sister, and I used exclusively Tahitian designs. These designs touch me deeply and I have more feeling with this style, because it is rare and specific to certain Society Islands, like Tahiti, Raiatea or Maupiti. These are little-known designs, but they have an incredible symbolic force.

**Can you explain to us how it distinguishes itself from other styles, in particular by its aesthetics and symbolism?**

The Tahitian style is both simple and deeply spiritual. It is a philosophy, a way of thinking. It draws its inspiration from ancestral beliefs and revolves around nature, the sea and traditional

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**T**ahiti, November 30, 2024 - As the Tahiti Tattoo Fest 2024 is in full swing, male tattoo artists, bare-chested and covered in tattoos, dominate the scene. But in a corner of the room, Heipuanui stands out. At 34, this tattoo artist stands out for her attachment to the "Tahitian style", an art that she explains is little-known and poorly documented. Away from the excitement, she spoke to Tahiti Infos about her approach to tattooing, her career and her

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medicine. It features many representations of plants, mountains and stars. For example, in the tattoo I did today, I included several stars to symbolize the period of maritime abundance. Unlike Patutiki, which is often centered on divine representations, Tahitian tattooing focuses on specific and concrete elements that reflect the beliefs and way of life of our ancestors.

**You mention that the Tahitian style is little known, or even unknown, even within the Polynesian islands. Why do you think it has not benefited from the same recognition or transmission as other forms of tattooing?**

C'est une bonne question, je ne sais pas trop. Peut-être que les explorateurs ou les premiers auteurs à documenter le tatouage polynésien ont jugé ce style moins intéressant ou moins spectaculaire qu'un autre. Les sources historiques sur le style tahitien sont vraiment rares. Lorsque j'étais au Centre des métiers d'arts, où j'ai été formée, c'est Tavana Salmon (une figure emblématique du tatouage polynésien, ndr) qui nous avait prêté quelques documents pour approfondir nos connaissances, mais il y a très peu de matériel à disposition et de référencement. Mais après tout, ce manque de documentation contribue à préserver son authenticité.

**Ta formation initiale au Centre des Métiers d'Art semble avoir marqué un tournant dans ta vie artistique. Est-ce que tu avais déjà l'ambition de devenir tatoueuse en intégrant cet établissement ?**

Pas du tout ! À l'époque, je n'étais absolument pas dans cet univers. Mon arrivée dans le tatouage s'est faite complètement par hasard. Au CMA, j'ai eu l'occasion de toucher à plusieurs disciplines : la peinture, la sculpture, et finalement le tatouage. C'est là que j'ai découvert que j'aimais beaucoup ça. Mais c'est drôle, car en y repensant, je me souviens qu'à l'adolescence, avec ma sœur, on s'amusait à se tatouer avec de l'encre de Chine et des aiguilles. On avait quatorze ans, et c'étaient des conneries à l'époque, mais peut-être que ça annonçait déjà quelque chose.



Crédit photo : Thibault Segalard.



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**After this discovery at the CMA, you certainly needed to improve your skills with other artists. Where and how did you continue your training in tattooing?**

During my studies at the CMA, I did several internships to train: first at Efraïma Tattoo, then at Tattoo by Patu. Then, after graduating, I had the chance to join Patu's studio. He was the one who trained me. Patu is an excellent mentor and a good school, and many artists have gone through his workshop. I learned a lot with him.

**Over time, your style and vision of tattooing have certainly evolved. How do you perceive this evolution and what are the challenges it involves?**

I hope to evolve in the right direction! (laughs) Over time, we gain in precision, technique, and confidence. But the profession requires us to constantly stay up to date, because the new generation is arriving with fresh ideas and tools that we didn't have before, especially thanks to the Internet. And young people, they are really very strong. It's a constant challenge to continue learning and renewing yourself.

**Participating in a convention like this, where you're surrounded by talented artists, is necessarily a special experience. What does this type of event bring to your daily life as a tattoo artist?**

Conventions allow you to challenge yourself and make yourself known. There are a lot of visitors, whether they are passionate or simply curious, and it offers incredible visibility. Participating is also a way to show your work, gain notoriety and meet other artists. After a convention, there are always positive repercussions, especially if you win an award. With social networks, everything goes very quickly today, and a convention can really boost your clientele.

**Finally, I noticed that there were few female tattoo artists during this convention, and you are the only Polynesian. Do you think that tattooing remains a male-dominated field, or are there other reasons for this lack of female representation here?**

It's true that here, at this convention, there are few female tattoo artists. But be careful, there are a lot of really talented Polynesian tattoo artists. Some are even incredible. However, many of them have chosen to settle in France. I don't know why. That said, we can't really say that this environment is more masculine than feminine."

Written by Thibault Segalard on Saturday, November 30, 2024 at 2:57 p.m. | Read 2780 times



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