



"la Caixa" Foundation

★ MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY
JACQUES CHIRAC

TATTOO

ARTE BAJO LA PIEL



CaixaForum Madrid

From 2 December 2021 to 17 April 2022



The show examines the uses of tattooing in different periods and cultures, and the social role played by this ancestral practice

CaixaForum Madrid presents the biggest exhibition ever devoted to the history of tattooing

- ***Tattoo. Art Under the Skin***, produced and organised by Musée du quai Branly - Jaques Chirac of Paris and "la Caixa" Foundation, takes visitors on a journey into the unique universe of tattooing from an anthropological perspective, and analyses the resurgence of what is now a global phenomenon.
- Taking a singular and innovative approach, the exhibition traces tattooists and tattooed across time periods and continents to explore the confluences that have made tattooing a global form of artistic expression. Among the personalities featured is the Filipina tattoo artist Whang-od Oggay, 104, often described as the last master to use *batok* (traditional handmade tattoo).
- The exhibition features more than 240 historic and contemporary works, including paintings, drawings, photographs, books, objects – such as tools, masks and stamps – and audiovisuals, among others.
- Visitors can also discover a score of prototypes of hyperrealist silicone body parts tattooed in ink, created expressly for the exhibition by masters of this art from different parts of the world: Horiyoshi III, Filip Leu, Mark Kopua, Kari Barba, Jee Sayalero, and Laura Juan – a Madrid artist whose work reflects on social isolation and uncertainty during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tattoo. Art Under the Skin. Organised and produced by: Musée du quai Branly – Jaques Chirac of Paris and "la Caixa" Foundation. **Curator:** Anne Richard, founder of the magazine *HEY! modern art & pop culture*. **Dates:** From 4 pm on 2 December 2021 to 17 April 2022.

Place: CaixaForum Madrid (Paseo del Prado, 36).



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Madrid, 2 December 2021. At **CaixaForum Madrid** today, **Elisa Durán**, Deputy General Director of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, **Emmanuel Kasarhérou**, president of the Musée du quai Branly, **Isabel Fuentes**, Director of CaixaForum Madrid, and **Anne Richard**, curator and founder of the magazine *HEY! modern art & pop culture*, presented the exhibition *Tattoo. Art Under the Skin*. Produced and organised by Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac of Paris and "**la Caixa**" **Foundation**, the show features **more than 240 pieces from all over the world**, including paintings, drawings, books, inked silicone, tattooing tools, masks, photographs, stamps and 9 audiovisuals. The event was also attended by the lender, **Henk Schiffmacher**, renowned in the tattoo world for having tattooed members of the bands Red Hot Chili Peppers and Pearl Jam, as well as Kurt Cobain, the leader of Nirvana.

Taking an innovative anthropological approach, the exhibition examines the different uses of tattoos throughout history, as well as the **social role played by this ancestral practice in the world's cultures**, from repression to vindication. Visitors will be invited to explore the use of tattooing on all the continents, discovering its origins, how techniques have evolved and how different trends in the art of tattooing, which is now a **worldwide phenomenon**, coexist syncretically.

The vast technical and aesthetic history of tattooing spans more than 5,000 years, a history illustrated by tattooists and tattooed. Now, for the first time in Spain, visitors will be able to see the **largest exhibition ever devoted to tattooing**, and discover artists who have **helped this art to evolve**, but whose role has never been recognised in museums.

Today, at the height of the tattoo boom, it is estimated that 12% of Europe's citizens have at least one tattoo. However, this **fascination with tattooing** has a long history: from the impulse of the fairground attraction to the immediacy of street culture, tattooing embodies the desire to express to others, not only what we are, but also what we want to be, turning the skin into one's own personal canvas.

Tattooed hyperrealist body parts

When the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac opened for the first time with his exhibition in Paris in 2014, the leading tattooists of the day were invited to create **works on silicone replicas of different parts of the body**.



Subsequently, at each stop as the show travelled around the world, tattooists of different nationalities have been commissioned to produce works, and it has been constantly enriched by new exhibits, from traditional tattoos to the most innovative creations.

The more than 240 pieces in the exhibition include 22 prototypes that hyper-realistically reproduce parts of the human body. These parts are moulded in experimental material and have been tattooed by such eminent tattoo artists as **Kari Barba** (America), **Tin-Tin** (France), **Horiyoshi III** (Japan), **Felix Leu** (Switzerland), **Mark Kopua** (New Zealand), **Jack Rudy** (America), Xed LeHead (England) and Chimé (Polynesia).

This section also features works by two Madrid-based artists who will be guests at the official opening and make their debut in the exhibition. In her work, the Madrilenian tattoo artist **Laura Juan** reflects on social isolation during the pandemic in Spain; the uncertainty, the silent – and invisible – advance of the virus, and the loss of freedom. For his part, **Jee Sayalero**, a Venezuelan tattoo artist, explores the term "isthmus", a small strip of land where exchanges take place between different cultures. Jee's art features allusions to Japanese folklore and to works by such artists as Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí.

These silicone pieces are among the most striking features in this exhibition, along with the many different objects, drawings, engravings and photographs that showcase ancient tattooing practices on all the continents. They enable what was originally an ephemeral inscription on the skin of a particular person to be preserved, studied and shared to illustrate the history and aesthetics of tattooing.

[An artform that goes beyond the skin](#)

The works are mostly from the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, but also include an outstanding series of pieces from around **fifty lenders** based in the United States, Japan, France, Thailand, the United Kingdom and so on.

Among the pieces on show are items such as the electric pen unveiled by the inventor Thomas Edison in 1877 (and which was the predecessor of today's tattoo machine); a trunk used to carry the tools of travelling tattoo artists; an acrylic painting featuring a portrait of Artoria, a famous sideshow artist from the 1920s; an original album by Rich Mingus, edited by Henk Schiffmacher in 2011, containing photographs, postcards and clippings from periodicals on the theme of tattooing since the 19th century; a flute in the form of a statuette from the



Mayan culture, adorned by **representations of facial tattoos**; tools and utensils for tattooing; a flute in the form of a statuette from the Mayan culture with depictions of facial tattoos; tools and utensils for tattooing; a statuette in the shape of a flute from the Late Period of Mayan culture, adorned by depictions of facial tattoos; 19th century tattooing tools and utensils from Indonesia, Burma, Tunisia, Argentina and Australia; and portraits of groups with their identifying tattoos, such as the Central American Mara gang and the Japanese Yakuza mafia.

The show also recognises artists that conserve this ancient art, such as the Filipina Whang-od Oggay, 104 years of age, often described as the last master to use *batok* (traditional handmade tattoo); and the Maori of New Zealand, who practice *moko*, the art of "skin sculpting", a symbol of indigenous collective consciousness.

A voyage into the depths of tattooing

The exhibition itinerary, with five different stops, begins with a global perspective that helps the visitor to **understand the link between tattoos and the marginal**, crime and its spectacularisation. In the second section, tattooing is presented as an art in movement, noting particularly its expansion into Japan, North America and Europe, from its origins to the present day. The third stop highlights the **revival of traditional tattooing** in New Zealand, Samoa, Polynesia, Indonesia, East Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Beginning in the 1970s, new schools emerged and expanded into fresh territories around the world, including China and Taiwan and Latin America, driven by the Chicano tattoo movement, explored in the fourth section. Finally, the exhibition ends with a **reflection on tattooing today** and its perpetual search for renewal, differentiating between two trends: one marked mainly by a reinterpretation of historical genres; the other going beyond the classic codes of tattooing to explore the possibilities suggested by the graphic arts.

- **Tattooing linked to the marginal and the spectacle**

As a graphic medium of the global language, the art of tattooing has changed in significance throughout its history. The evolution of the practice – named after the Polynesian *tatau* ("open wound") that Captain Cook's European crew discovered in the 18th century – is the result of exchanges between countries, between fringe and mainstream trends, between centres and peripheries. For centuries, it played a discriminating role, **the mark of subjection and dishonour** or loss of identity. Overexposed today



due to the development of Internet and media interest in it, the **contemporary history of tattooing is written in time with technological advances.**

Since the mid-19th century, tattoos have become the bearers of both private and social messages. This is the case of ethnic groups such as the Maori, for example, who developed this **practice as an identity and social signifier** on the body of the tattooed. On it, a secret language was imprinted that perpetuated both a social legend and graphic styles determined to a large extent by the rudimentary techniques of the time. It is at this point that the non-tattooed began to notice the tattooed and attach powerful prejudices to them.

The tattooed person, previously considered marginal, began to be seen as a spectacle from 1840 onwards. This was when the **Chicago World's Fair** became the catalyst for the first travelling circuses, which featured tattooed people in their shows in the same way bearded women and sword-swallowers, or installed them in outdoor booths at the entrance to their tents as sideshows, secondary attractions.

- **An art in movement**

Since the times of Marco Polo in the 13th century, tattooing has travelled in expeditions, the capture of prisoners and adventurers' routes. In 1891, the **invention of the electric tattoo machine** by the American Samuel O'Reilly helped to spread interest in tattooing. Much of the American tattoo boom stemmed from observation of the Japanese *irezumi*: American and Japanese tattooists crossed the Pacific both ways to exchange their secrets. In the 20th century, the international dialogue between activists intensified, and tattooists from all over the world **began to set up clubs**, the first of which was founded in 1953 in Bristol (UK) in 1953. This type of reunions heralded a new chapter in the evolution and artistic history of tattooing.

In this section, the exhibition pays tribute to the work of great masters who have revolutionised contemporary tattooing. These include the artist **Don Ed Hardy** (born 1945), who has promoted international artistic exchanges and transformed his **fascination with the ancient Japanese art of tattooing** into creative energy.



In Western Europe, the **Ötzi mummy**, which is more than 4,500 years old, provides the earliest real evidence of the practice of tattooing. Some 2,000 years later, various of the 200 Celtic peoples who settled much of Western Europe (France, Belgium, Italy, western Germany) also had marks on their bodies. In the 19th century, **tattooing was renewed and spread across the continent**: people displayed their tattoos, not only in the dwellings of the poor, but also in the comfort of *salons* and at court; even members of European royal families had tattoos, and their designs were widely reported in the popular press. In the 20th century, tattooing became part of art history: in the 1980s, the Swiss tattoo artist **Felix Leu** (1945-2002), alias Don Feliz, rejected any distinction between academic and popular art. And, before him, in London, **Sutherland MacDonald** (1850-1937), known as "the Michelangelo of tattooing", had the words "tattoo artist" printed on his business card in 1891.

- **The renewal and persistence of traditional tattooing**

Traditional tattooing in Oceania and Southeast Asia has also undergone a revolution in its ethnographic, tribal and magical conception since the late-1970s: the ancient practice of tattooing, influenced by constant exchanges generated by the development of transport and tourism, has become globalised and now forms part of a **network of influence among all societies at world level**.

For example: in **New Zealand**, the *moko*, a tattoo of curves and spirals inspired by fern shoots, was the specific ornamentation of chiefs and warriors and is today considered a national treasure (*taonga*); in the Samoan islands, the *pe'a* (male tattoo), necessary to take a wife and denoting membership of the village and the group of young men charged with serving and protecting the chiefs; or the legacy of the *Kalinga* tattoo, still recreated today by **Whang-od Oggay** who, at 104, is considered the oldest tattoo artist in the world and the last practitioner of this age-old adornment adopted by warrior tribes.

- **New territories for tattooing**

During this same period, new schools emerged, reflecting the artistic dynamism that has characterised the evolution of contemporary tattooing. In 1977, the tattoo artists **Charlie Cartwright**, **Jack Rudy** and **Freddy Negrete** expanded the boundaries of detail and shading. The new Chicano



"black-and-gray" style spread among the prisons where they were incarcerated, particularly among Latinos from around the US border. These tattooists began to draw once more on imagery from their history, creating graphic works based on a daring rereading of the past. They revived the symbols of cultural heroism in new compositions and colour palettes. Now, **graffiti** and its peculiar typefaces, "**hood art**", the **lowrider aesthetic** (customised cars), mural painting, Catholic religious iconography and so on, began to be reflected on the skin.

Meanwhile, in China, tattooing has always been an ancestral practice among minorities living in territories not administered by the power of the time due to its geographical remoteness. Tattoos were banned in the 1960s, during **Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution**, which considered them a manifestation of impurity and dishonesty. However, the practice of tattooing has been making a comeback since the 2000s, the leaders of this revival inspired by both the **pop culture of the entertainment industry**, with its profusion of playful images (manga, video games, film), and the huge heritage of historical Chinese iconography.

- **Tattooing as a sign of identity and personal branding**

Although tattoos cannot always be deciphered, they embody the sign of one's relation with oneself, of the individual with the group and of the tattooist and the tattooed. After the styles created by the tattoo artists **Leo Zulueta** and, later, **Alex Binnie**, **Xed LeHead** and **Yann Black**, a new generation has steered tattooing into the third millennium.

Today, two trends can be distinguished. Firstly, artists who base their work on **reinterpreting historical genres**, adding the Japanese *irezumi*, American old school tattooing or, to the "fine line", the wild style of Russian gulag tattooing or the raw French style. And, secondly, a trend in which an **aesthetic freed from classical codes** is employed to explore the possibilities of the graphic arts, in which typefaces, pixels, patterns and outlines generate different types of motifs and compositions that border on abstraction.

Activities: from a theme night with a live tattoo demonstration to a talk on scar repair tattooing



Parallel to the exhibition, CaixaForum Madrid is organising an extensive programme of innovative activities, coordinated through the expertise of **Clara Peñalver**. The activities include a series of talks and round table discussions focusing on the **history of tattooing**, with all its lights and shadows, **current trends in this art form**, and the theme of restorative tattooing, which has helped many people to find themselves again after illnesses such as breast cancer. All this, featuring the likes of **Laura Cubero**, director of the BAUM Fest Barcelona Tattoo Expo; **Cristina Vara Ocón**, PhD in Contemporary History from the University of Granada; and **Mariló Fernández**, a tattoo artist who specialises in damaged and scarred skin.

The parallel events will also include: a **theme night** featuring a live graffiti show by the artist **Albert Bonet**; a concert and a performance; and a live tattoo demonstration organised by BAUM Fest, at which three tattoo artists working in different styles will showcase their work. There will also be several talks: one exploring the link between tattooing and transhumanism with **Albert Grau Loyola**, vice-president of the Spanish Tattoo Federation and director and teacher at the European School of Tattooing and Piercing; another on the custom of collecting tattooed skins, with **Josep Martí**, PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Philipps-Universität in Marburg; and a talk on how film, literature and tattooing mutually nourish each other, guided by the writer **Eva Campos Navarro**.



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JACQUES CHIRAC

Press Release

Tattoo.

Art Under the Skin

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