

**Title: Welcome to Tattoos:
Ritual. Identity. Obsession. Art.**

The tradition of tattoos has a history of at least 5,000 years, is deep-rooted, strong, and global. The word “tattoo” comes from the Polynesian *tatau*, recorded by European explorers during the 18th century. Tattooing has re-invented itself around the world, from indigenous origins to those on the fringes of society to mainstream groups. And from underground trends to popular culture. International exchanges between innovative tattoo artists has led to the standards and techniques now used in contemporary tattooing.

Over the course of this history, beyond ritual, magical, and social uses, tattooing emerged as an explicit artistic practice. Today, the transformation continues alongside artistic and technological advances.

This exhibition traces tattoos over continents and time, examining both the artists and the tattooed, and exploring the factors that have made tattooing an important cultural practice, compelling art form, and modern phenomenon.

Title: Tattooing Today

Building on a foundation by renowned tattoo artists, a new generation has brought tattooing into the 21st century, and many new genres have appeared. One is inspired by traditional motifs —the Japanese *irezumi* tradition, Indigenous styles, “old school” American designs, and Russian gulag tattoos. Another school distances itself from current trends to explore the unlimited potential of graphic arts, using typographies, pixels, and sketches that reveal new, sometimes abstract compositions. Over the last decade, tattooing has pushed boundaries to produce a new aesthetic.

A number of artworks have been created especially for this exhibition by master tattoo artists from around the world. This silicone mold of an arm was constructed using a live model and tattooed as if it were real skin by self-taught tattoo artist Yann Black.

Black is part of an avant-garde movement challenging conventional tattoo art. He started his career at age 20 in Paris and Brussels, tattooing “childlike characters” on people. In 2000, he joined Tribal Art studio and currently owns Glamort Tattoo Parlor in Montreal. Black describes his unique style as “between naïve art, German Expressionism, and Russian Constructivism.”

The inking of this silicone arm features a bold, geometric design in black and red that spans the appendage from wrist to shoulder. On the back of the hand, a solid crimson circle occupies most of the area. From the mid-forearm, it picks up in what resembles the sleeve of a t-shirt with black lines that zip zag up and wrap the arm. The lines connect to varying sizes of solid rectangular blocks, some black, some red. The zig zag lines curve to the upper arm, connecting to more solid block shapes. Both the outer and inner arm are inked with the design with ends in a thick crimson stripe just short of the armpit and is capped with a black tip.

MOVE TO RIGHT OF THIS DISPLAY CASE TO THE ONE OPPOSITE THE HISTORY WALL.

Title: Global to Marginal

Once a practice shared by much of humanity, tattooing was repressed by missionary and colonial powers. During the Age of Discovery, European travellers in Asia, Oceania, and the Americas “rediscovered” tattoos which then became popular among sailors and adventurers, and later associated with the fringes of society. By the 20th century, tattoos spread to other social classes and circulated through the streets, prisons, military, and performing arts.

Title: Tattoos of the World

Around the world, the history of tattooing has included tools and pigments, as well as cultural traditions and processes that resulted in marking the body. Since ancient times, the tattoo has taken multiple forms for many purposes, from fending off disease in Japan, to indicating the skills of a wife and mother in Inuit culture, to marking a master weaver in Borneo. Tattoos have been used to cure, honour, marginalize, control, punish, enhance, and demean the bearer. But, one aspect remains common—marking the skin puts people in relationships that are social, political, and cosmological.

Stop 1

This tattooing ink pad is on loan from Musee du Quai Branly in Paris and was a gift from Alix de Rothschild.

It originally belonged to the Razzouk family of 17-18th century Jerusalem, who for 250 years have been tattooing Pilgrims with commemorations of their journeys.

The pad is soaked with ink made from candle soot then pressed onto the body. The intricate designs are then traced into the ink before being permanently tattooed into the skin with a needle.

The object is carved from Olive wood. It's approx. 5" long by 2" wide, is oblong in shape, with a rounded top edge and straight bottom edge. It's carved with three scenes featuring angels or cherubs.

At the top, two winged beings hold a crown over a manger. A small star hangs above the crib and wings extend below it to each side.

At the centre, a cherubic being without wings stands on a low stool. He reaches at a star above an ornamental altar with a steeple-shaped lid and a cross on top. A pattern of swirls frame the scene.

The bottom of the pad has three small winged angels with curly hair, joined by the hand and staring out at the viewer.

TURN 180d TO THE WALL BEHIND YOU.

Title: Street, Army, Jail

For centuries, the tattoo was a mark of humiliation, servitude, or defiance. From the tattooing of slaves in ancient Rome and criminals in imperial China, to Colbert's *Code noir* in France, which marked criminals and prostitutes, the tattoo identified individuals definitively, immediately, and permanently. By the 19th century, tattooing became a well-established way of making a statement. In the army and navy, and from sidewalks to the gulags, tattoos created a vocabulary for a population determined to identify and assert itself on its own terms.

Stop 2

This is the Book of Sketches and Drawings Showing Life in the Gulag By Danzig Baldaev. It originates from 1966 Leningrad and is part of a Private collection in Paris. This inventory of tattoos was once used by the KGB for identifying criminals.

From 1948-1981, Danzig Baldaev was a civil servant in Soviet prisons. He had a keen interest in prison culture and spent many hours copying the tattoos of Russian inmates. He decoded a secret language in the ink and learned the communication. A skull and crossbones indicated a conviction for murder. A cat signified a thief. A prostitute would be tattooed with a penis.

Prison staff was represented by pigs and wolves; Lady Justice by a sow. Stars on the hand indicated number of years incarcerated; Crosses- the number of convictions. Rings on the fingers showed prison rank and if a tattoo was felt to be undeserved it was removed by force.

This collection features a number of images of prison life. Amid swastikas and national emblems some of the more graphic images include:

- A father, mother and child all adorned with regal crowns.
- A small engraved cross shrouded in flames.
- A woman in harem pants sitting cross-legged atop a pedestal, wielding a knobbed club.
- Another woman sitting naked on a throne, a sword at her right hand, her bare feet on an open book.
- A dagger is plunged through the back of a demon's skull, the blade emerging through his mouth.
- A tattooed hand has a horned demon on the back and each finger bears a ring with a national emblem. The pinkie features a swastika,
- Each knuckle has a number which together indicate the year 1963.
- A large pirate ship with a skull and crossbones logo crosses splashing waters.
- A wolfish figure with the face of a pig wears an official uniform. One hand clutches a bat, the other wields a pistol and his testicles prominently protrude between its legs.
- A drooling wolf in uniform fondles the bare breasts of a woman in dark glasses and her skirt lifted to expose her genitals.
- A horned demon with a horse tail sits on a thick book with his back to the viewer
- And a horned pig with multiple breasts writes in a ledger while ringing a servant's bell.

FOLLOW THIS WALL TO THE RIGHT AND AROUND THE CORNER INTO THE NEXT EXHIBIT AREA. AT ABOUT MID POINT, HIGH UP ON THE WALL, TWO ENORMOUS PORTRAITS HANG SIDE BY SIDE

Title: The Sideshow

At the beginning of the 1830s in North America, sideshows set up caravans with travelling circuses. These wandering museums of curiosities featured fairground attractions and extraordinary people—the bearded lady, the human skeleton, and the person tattooed “from head to toe”—often employing seasonal or itinerant tattooists. The tattooed performer later became the sword-swallower, animal-tamer, fire-eater, telepathist, wrestler, knife-thrower. Europe, in particular, welcomed these performers, and the tattooed body entered its golden age at the start of the 20th century.

On the left is stop 3

A majestic 5X6.5 foot acrylic paint on canvas titled *Artoria*, by artist Titine K-Leu, is part of the series *Homage to Tattooing Icons*. It dates back to 1990 and is part of the artist’s private collection in Switzerland.

Titine was the wife of the famed tattoo artist Filip Leu. After collecting photos and memorabilia to immerse herself in the circus, she immortalized many of the tattooed performers, among them Anna, “*Artoria*” Gibbons, a 1920s maid who became a circus regular to avoid extreme poverty. *Artoria* bore a number of tattoos by Charlie Wagner and her husband Charles Red Gibbons. Being quite pious—most had religious overtones.

In this portrait, young brunette *Artoria* wears a pearl headband with a spray of feathers at each temple around her soft curls. Her deep blue dress has a full skirt that stops at her knee with a white feather trim around the hemline. The bodice wraps her bosom like a corset.

Her chest, arms and calves are covered with an intricate web of tattoos resembling a bodysuit. On her chest, a regal-looking man is surrounded by star spangled banners.

Her arms feature images of saintly women, flowers, birds and butterflies. No inch of skin is left bare.

Artoria’s legs dangle off a perch and each shin features the image of a woman, each with a halo, and cherubic children peeking out from the folds of her skirt. Swirls of colour continue across *Artoria*’s feet and into a pair of blue slippers that match the colour of her frock.

The backdrop is a halo of light and swirls and each corner of the canvas has a colourful little bird or two with a thistle in its beak.

MOVE TO THE RIGHT, AROUND THE CORNER TO THE NEXT EXHIBIT AREA THEN CONTINUE TO THE FAR WALL ACROSS THE SPACE. HUG THE WALL TO YOUR LEFT TO AVOID DISPLAY MATERIAL IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM.

Title: Art on the move

Through exchanges between artists in Europe, Asia, and North America, tattooing emerged as a dynamic form of artistic expression. American tattooing owes a great deal to the Japanese tattoo

tradition of *irezumi*. After WWII, American and Japanese tattoo artists shared techniques and motifs. The electric tattoo machine, first patented in 1891 by American Samuel O'Reilly, expanded the possibilities of tattooing everywhere. As the international dialogue between advocates grew, tattoo artists began gathering in clubs, first in 1953 in the UK. The inaugural international tattooing convention was held in Texas in 1976. These meetings sparked a global resurgence in tattooing.

Title: Japan

Japan has a long history of indigenous tattoos. In the 17th century, tattooing—called *irezumi*, from *ire*, “to insert” and *sumi*, “ink”—was adopted by commoners and later used to mark criminals. Decorative tattooing peaked in the early 19th century with the popularity of *Suikoden*, the translation of the Chinese novel *Water Margin*, which chronicled the adventures of tattooed bandits. When Japan opened up to the West in the mid-19th century, foreigners were fascinated by the tattooed bodysuits that incorporated designs from nature, folklore, and religion. Tattooing underwent many bans and restrictions in Japan and became associated with organized crime. Today, an ultra-connected world is allowing new generations to contribute to the global tattoo culture.

Stop 4

ON THIS WALL IS A NUMBER OF DISPLAY ITEMS OF JAPANESE TATTOO CULTURE.

This black and white gelatine silver print entitled *Yakuzas at the Baths* dates back to 1996 France.

In the 20th century, Yakuzas were members of organized crime in Japan and have historically maintained an association to criminal activity. They often had striking full body tattoos that resembled bodysuits, and this association meant tattoos were considered taboo. This is still so prevalent in the Japanese psyche that some public baths and saunas prohibit use by people bearing tattoos to this day.

Three Yakuzas are in this photo; all naked and embellished with full body ink.

The man at the centre has his arms tightly folded across his chest, his genitals on display, his eyes behind dark lenses. Wet black hair hangs to his shoulders and a thin goatee frames his sneer. His tattoo resembles pods or nettles that densely cover his body like fabric. Ink covers his shoulders and stops on his upper arms like short sleeves then colours in his torso, except for a strip of bare skin down the centre; making it look like he has on a blazer that's hanging open. The pattern continues over his hips and stops on his upper thighs.

A man to his right is also stamped with this type of imagery from the neck down in a one-piece bodysuit. He's partially obscured behind the first Yakuza and has his gaze downcast. His wet black hair is cropped and his pose is more relaxed with his arms on his lap.

The third man has his back to the viewer, displaying an image of a young person wrapped in the fins of a large fish. This young person looks out at the viewer. The fish is turned away. Some skin is left natural, but the man's arms are completely covered in an intricate pattern of fish scales.

The group sits on a stone bench in a shallow pool inside a room with sunlight cascading through a window.

TURN 180d TO THE GLASS DISPLAY CABINET

Stop 5

This woodblock print of coloured ink on paper is titled *Kaoshō Rochishin* from *Suikoden*. It is by an unknown Japanese artist and is a gift courtesy of Professor James King. The 9.4 X 12.4 cm piece dates back to somewhere between 1830-1835 and is part of the Royal Ontario Museum's Far Eastern Collection called *Water Margin*.

These prints depict some of the 108 heroes from the novel *Suikoden*, or *Water Margin*, which details the struggle of tattooed outlaws against corrupt authorities. Common people identified with the tattooed outlaws so much so that it prompted a surge in tattooing in Japan.

Tattoos were once designed exclusively by artists of *ukiyo-e*, or woodblock prints. By the early 19th century master tattoo artists took over. It was then that the standards of Japanese tattooing were established to include backgrounds, black outlines, and compositions taken from prints, all still used today.

This print is bold in colour and somewhat violent in theme. It shows a hefty Chinese man in a turquoise robe that hangs open and off his shoulders. He has a woman pinned to the ground, her red dress lifted to expose the pale flesh of her splayed legs. She appears to be trying to claw herself out of his forcible restraint.

MOVE LEFT FROM THIS CABINET AND ACROSS THE SMALL AISLE TO THE ADJACENT WALL AND A SMALL CURIO CABINET

Title: North America

Tattoos were widespread among the Indigenous Peoples of North America, from Baffin Island to the Mississippi River Delta and from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Haida Gwaii. Concerned about cultural loss, current generations of many Indigenous Peoples are revitalizing their tattoo traditions.

Non-indigenous tattooing borrowed heavily from Europe before finding its own graphic style, bright colours, thick outlines in the 20th century. It continued to change significantly in the US because of the invention of the electric tattoo machine, and the efforts of pioneering tattoo artists—including Sailor Jerry and Ed Hardy, who were fascinated by Japanese tattooing.

Stop 6

This Sculpture entitled *Inuit Woman with Tattoos* is by artist Dominique Tungilik of Nunavut, Canada. It dates back to before 1989 and is currently part of The ROM's *Anthropology Collection*. It is a generous gift from Richard C. Martin.

Across the Arctic, facial tattoos mark a young woman's passage from girlhood and represent her mastery of the skills needed to be a wife and mother. Tattoos on the hands connect her to the spiritual realm, often honour deities and record collective memory.

This stone carving is honed from solid jade and features a naked woman seated with her legs and arms extended before her. She has long hair down her back and very small breasts.

Each thigh and shoulder is tattooed with a rectangle filled in with a wide herring bone pattern. Her face is tattooed with fine lines that extend from the corners of her nose, others down her chin, like whiskers.

CONTINUE ALONG THIS WALL TO THE RIGHT TO ANOTHER GLASS CABINET APPROX 6 FEET AWAY.

Stop 7

This Electric Stencil Pen invented by Thomas Edison dates back to 1877 United States. It is part of the Schiffmacher Collection from the Amsterdam Tattoo Museum.

A precursor to today's tattooing devices, the needle produced 3,000 punctures per minute and was used to create perforated stencils on paper.

In 1875 New York City, Irish immigrant Samuel O'Reilly opened a tattoo shop. Inspired by Edison, O'Reilly patented his own electric tattoo pen in 1891 that included its own ink reservoir and additional needles.

This patent drawing shows a pen-like wand with a cluster of fine needles arranged into a point at the tip. The pen elbows midway, like a finger rest, then continues up to an electric component on top.

This features two spinning wheels that work in tandem to facilitate a puncturing movement. The needles are fed into the skin while simultaneously being fed ink from a separate reservoir fed through a thin intravenous line.

CONTINUE ALONG THIS WALL TO THE RIGHT AND AROUND THE CORNER INTO THE NEXT EXHIBIT SPACE. CROSS THE OPEN ROOM TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE WHERE THERE IS A LARGE DISPLAY CABINET.

Title: Europe

Tattooing in Europe dates to at least the Chalcolithic, when Ötzi lived—a man whose tattooed body was preserved for 4,500 years in the ice of the Tyrolian Alps. Tattooing declined in Europe with the spread of Christianity, which regarded marking the body as “pagan” or “heathen”. However, it was still practiced by religious pilgrims. In the 19th century, tattooing became more appreciated as art. In London in 1891, “tattoo artist” appeared on calling cards. And in the 1980s, Swiss tattoo artist Félix Leu—one of the fathers of European contemporary tattooing—joined those who rejected any distinction between academic and popular art.

Stop 8

This silicone mold of a torso and upper legs was created using a live model, and tattooed as if it is actual skin. Twelve other tattooed silicone body parts are displayed throughout the exhibition.

Tin-Tin is the most famous French Tattoo artist to date. He was born in 1965 and began his tattooing career in 1984, using army comrades as his canvas. He received early equipment from legendary Parisian tattoo artist Marcel, whom Tin-Tin said, “didn’t really train him, but he let him watch him—in itself an apprenticeship.”

Tin-Tin is admired for his signature hyperrealist work and mastery of neo-Japanese style and advocates for the recognition of tattooing as an art form. He co-created the *National Union of Tattoo Artists* in 2003.

This life size mold featuring the trunk of a nude woman is cut off at the elbows and knees. She has a trim figure with average size breasts, rounded hips and her genitals are bare of pubic hair.

Her tattoos reflect diverse imagery. Over her right breast a black and white image of a man smiles out at the viewer. His body is not visible except for his left hand which he casually holds up over her left breast.

Starting under her left breast, a horned serpent snakes down her abdomen and over her hip. It has a scaly black skin with a bright purple underbelly that ends in a spike-tipped tail on her upper thigh. The serpent’s head on her stomach is surrounded by spiked gills and it bears a demonic glare and snarl.

The model’s right hip is embellished with a vibrant pink flower sprouting healthy green leaves. Another larger pink bloom wraps the full width of her right thigh.

Keep to the left of this cabinet and round the corner into the next exhibition area. Directly at the entrance to the space is a large glass cabinet. Circle it to stand in front of the next display.

Title: Reviving Traditions

In Oceania and much of Asia, tattooing was largely abandoned in the 19th century as a result of colonization, missionary work, and changing societies. Except for a few islands, tattooing customs and practices waned. Starting in the 1970s, a small number of tattoo artists travelled the world. They were exposed to ancient tattooing traditions, while Indigenous tattooists were introduced to new international markets. Now there is an unprecedented revival of traditional tattooing techniques and motifs, which is dynamic and global, with New Zealand, Samoa, and the island of Borneo as important reference points.

Title: New Zealand

In New Zealand, traditional tattooing is called *tā moko*. A spiral tattoo inspired by the crociers of ferns, the *moko* was the ornament of chiefs and warriors. Like elsewhere in Polynesia, tattooing transformed after the Europeans arrived. In the 20th century, it survived as facial tattoos on Māori

women and gang members, who reproduced the former warrior “mask of defiance.” This resurgence is part of a larger revival of traditional language and culture in New Zealand. Today, the moko has been raised to the rank of *taonga*, or national treasure, and has inspired many Māori artists

Stop 9

This carved mask is called a *Koruru* or *Parata*, which translated means *gable mask*. It dates back to 19th century from the Māori of New Zealand and is courtesy of Musée du quai Branly in Paris.

Koruru are carved from wood and embellished with white pigment and paua shell. They depict ancestral figures and are placed on the doorframes of Maori meeting houses. In ancient techniques, unique facial tattoos were carved into the skin with sculptor’s blades. Today, this much slower and intensely more painful technique is rarely practiced.

This Koruru depicts a man with no hair on his head or face. It has a full forehead and a full chin, a short straight nose and an intense gaze. The vivid whites of the eyes sharply contrast the dark brown of the wood.

From the centre of the brows, channels fan upward and outward to the temples. A pattern of swirling lines cover the crown of the head.

Under the eyes, starting off the bridge of the nose, more channels sweep down the cheeks, frame hard set lips and end in swirls at the chin, under the lower lip.

The high points of the cheekbones bear a circular pattern and all carvings offset light from shadow.

Moving to the left several more glass curio cabinets stand in the centre of the room. Circle them to the left side, keeping between them and the wall running along the left side of the space.

Title: Samoa

The Samoan islands are the only part of Polynesia where tattooing has continued without interruption. Tattoos were once a mandatory initiation rite. The *pe’a* - or male back tattoo - was required to marry, and signified that a man served and protected the chiefdom. In the 19th century, the ritual and tools underwent some changes but the practice never disappeared. It is still passed down by descendants of the *tufuga ta tatau*, *ritual tattooing experts*, and is very popular beyond the Samoan community. Guardians of its heritage, like the Samoan tattoo artist Su’a Loli Tikeli and the Sulu’ape family, are central in the renewal of indigenous tattoo traditions around the world.

Stop 10

These Tattooing Tools were made by Su’a Loli Tikeli of Samoa. They are honed from wood, hog tusk, nylon, and plastic and are part of the private collection of Sébastien Galliot of Marseille, France

These tools of the *tufuga ta tatau*, which translates to ritual tattooing experts, consist of serrated bone combs called *au*. The bone is lashed to a short wooden handle and a tapping mallet, known as

a *sausau*, is used to drive the combs into the skin and etch a design. Coconut shell cups called *ipuniu* are used to mix ink, which is made from the soot of burnt candlenuts and used to permanently ink the design into the skin.

These tools look like painters brushes but with the bristled heads tilted at 90 degree angles to the handles. The piercing combs are flat and vary in width from approximately half an inch to two inches, some honed into a point, others spread out like a fan..

CONTINUE TO THE LEFT ALONG THIS CASE TO THE NEXT CASE BEHIND IT.

Title: Eastern Polynesia

Although their iconographic traditions are clearly different, numerous eastern Polynesian regions have a similar history of tattooing. Missionary and colonial influences changed the indigenous belief systems, which transformed the iconographies and resulted in a near abandonment of tattooing in the 19th century. But since the 1980s, several generations of artists from Tahiti, the Marquesas, and Hawaii have led a revitalization of tattooing and have helped make their complex geometrical designs popular in Western professional tattooing.

Stop 11

This silicone mold of an arm was created using a live model and tattooed as if it is actual skin. Twelve other tattooed silicone body parts are displayed throughout the exhibition.

Ernesto Kalum of Sarawak, Malaysia began tattooing in 1993. He's dedicated to promoting the Iban tattoo culture of Borneo and is initially self-taught, using his own body as his original canvas. In Europe, Kallum was discovered by Sailor Bit and introduced to Swiss tattooist Felix Leu, who convinced him to stop using a tattoo machine and resume tattooing by hand. In 1998, Kalum opened Sarawak's first professional tattoo studio, creating designs based on the animist cosmology of Borneo's Iban tribe and its traditions.

This motif spans the full arm and features traits of a *Janguong*, which translates to dragon, as well as traits of a *Tekuyung*, which translates to snail. Both creatures have spiritual and cultural meaning. These images are highly stylized depictions of each creature done in a bold design of black ink contrasted by white flesh. A swirling pattern on the shoulder resembles a snail shell surrounded by a soft-petalled flower while a four inch dragon is etched across the forearm.

KEEPING TO THE LEFT SIDE OF THE CABINET, TURN TO THE WALL 180d BEHIND YOU.

Title: The Philippines, Borneo and Indonesia

Tattooing in this vast region declined after Western colonization. However, the tradition remained vibrant in isolated areas where there was little contact with colonizing powers and missionaries. The Kalingas of Luzon, the Mentawai of Siberut, and the Iban, Kayan, and Kenyah of Borneo continued their tattooing practices, which were linked to animist beliefs and head-hunting. Today,

urban populations are rediscovering these indigenous practices. Professional tattoo artists, working in tattoo parlours in cities, maintain close links with their ethnic groups through frequent trips and meetings with indigenous tattooists and tattooed elders.

Stop 12

This portrait of Apo Whang Od is by photographer Jake Verzosa of the Philippines. It dates back to 2011 and was reprinted for the exhibition from one of Verzosa's private exhibition prints.

Whang Od, now almost 100 years old, is one of the last Kalinga master tattooists. She lives a traditional life in the mountains of central Luzon where she's training a new generation of Kalinga masters, including her great niece, although, Od, herself, is still in great demand as a tattooist.

The slight woman has dark hair with a broad grey streak that she wears pulled back from her weathered face. She peers into the distance, her hand cupping her chin, her brow furrowed. Her deep tanned skin is tattooed starting with a collar that circles her neck. A one inch stripe of skin is left untouched, creating a band, then the pattern continues over her shoulders and down her arms like a knit tank top. The dots and feathery strokes form a fine crochet-like weave and looks like a t-shirt that ends at her wrist.

MOVE TO THE RIGHT AND ROUND A DISPLAY CABINET AT THE INTERSECTION TO THE LEFT TO AVOID THE LEVEL OF THE CEILING TO THE RIGHT. CROSS THE SPACE TO THE NEXT SMALL EXHIBIT AREA.

Title: New Territories

The evolution of contemporary tattooing continues to be defined by a unique artistic energy. In 1977, Freddy Negrete—the first professional tattoo artist with Chicano roots—Charlie Cartwright, and Jack Rudy pushed the boundaries of detail and shading with a new machine that used a single needle. This realist style, born in East Los Angeles, draws its subjects and visual elements from Chicano culture.

Title: China

Tattoos have had diverse statuses and meanings in China. They have adorned high society and been used as a punishment. For centuries, Confucian principles forbade any marking on the body. In some ethnic groups—like in the Yunnan region—tattooing is an ancient practice and survived outside the zones of the ruling powers. But tattooing was not widely practiced in China.

Over the past two decades, tattooing has resurfaced. In addition to influences from North America, Europe and Japan, Chinese artists take their inspiration from pop culture and the entertainment industry; in particular, Manga comics, video games and films and from China's vast heritage of iconography.

In the last 15 years, tattoos have spread among Chinese youth who value individualism. On their bodies are symbols of Chinese culture, or images from popular media, embodying the desires of a new generation—a past to be remembered and a future to be invented.

ON THE WALL TO THE RIGHT IS A NUMBER OF ITEMS WITH A CHINESE THEME.

Stop 13

This photo of a Buddhist Lion tattooed on a man's back is by Buddha Yang of Taiwan. Its date unknown, it's part of Yang's exhibition called *Chinese Tattoo Art*.

In the early 21st century, Chinese tattoo trends imitated American, European, and Japanese designs. More recently, Chinese tattoos have started to re-integrate more traditional imagery like the Buddha, lion, and dragon.

Buddhist Lions, often called "Foo-dogs" in the West, were common in pre-modern Chinese art. These divine creatures symbolize protectors with mystical powers and, because of their beauty and cultural importance, are key figures in contemporary tattooing.

The man in this photo is naked and crouched down, his back to the viewer. From the nape of his neck begins the hind quarters of a foo dog, its tail branching off into several tines like a fork. The creature sprawls over the spread of the man's back, hunched low on clawed lion paws, a vicious snarl on its face. Its head rests at the man's tailbone and the colourless tattoo is depicted in stark black ink against naturally pale skin. Continuing over the subject's buttocks and his legs is a pattern not quite discernable due to his position.

CONTINUE TO THE LEFT AND FOLLOW ALONG THE BACK WALL OF THE SPACE TO THE LEFT CORNER.

Title: Latino & Chicano

Chicano tattooing, centred in East Los Angeles and called "fine line" or "black and grey", is now on the skin of many tattooed people who have never set foot in those Hispanic neighbourhoods. The style was born in California jails, on the skin of convicts. In prisons, tattoo artists and *pintos* - who made *paños*, or prison handkerchiefs - produced drawings inspired by the zoot-suiters of the 1940s—a group including young Latino immigrants who distinguished themselves with flamboyant suits. The images come from the art of the *barrio* low-riders, wall paintings, graffiti, Catholic religious iconography, heroes of the Mexican Revolution, and pre-Colombian history.

Stop 14

Paños were one of the earliest expressions of Chicano identity, the defining culture of Mexicans living in the US. In the 1950s and 60s, prisoners would tear up their sheets and draw tattoo designs on them before officers gave them white handkerchiefs to stop them from destroying the bedding.

In the upper left corner, This *Paño* or Prison Handkerchief depicts images of Aztec Princesses and Zombies. The artist is unknown but it's from California, United States around 2000. It's ballpoint ink on cotton and is from the collection of Reno Leplat-Torti.

This Pano depicts a myriad of faces, both men and women, all adorned with a headdress. The women are young and bear an air of social status, their headdresses embellished with feathers, their

faces tattooed with subtle warrior-type designs. The men bear an air of protective mercenary, their headdresses more like battle helmets, their faces gaunt and shadowed, their gazes hardened. Around the perimeter is a number of skeletal souls with the sunken black eyes.

MOVING TO THE LEFT AND ALONG THE NEXT ADJACENT WALL OF THE SPACE IS THREE 4 X 3 FOOT PHOTOS OF VARIOUS BODY PARTS.

Stop 15

This original photograph, *S.T. Serie Maras*, by Isabel Muñoz, born 1951, is part of the artist's collection of original works in Madrid, Spain.

Isabel Muñoz spent three weeks inside several prisons in El Salvador photographing *maras Salvatruchas*, which translates to Salvadorian gangs. To express steadfast loyalty, gang members wear offensive tattoos that assert their antisocial behaviour. In the 1980s, some maras Salvatruchas immigrated to Los Angeles and took up residence on 13th and 18th streets, garnering the gang names MS-13 and MS-18.

This photo shows an extreme close up, cropped to just a dead on front angle of his face and menacing black eyes. Every inch of facial skin has ink design. His eyelids bear words, one indiscernible, the other reading eight. Roman numerals are scattered throughout on his forehead, under his left eye and below his bottom lip. Another reference of the word eight is scrawled across his upper lip. The number 656 is etched across the bridge of his nose and the bulbous area is tattooed with an image similar to a tortoise shell. His cheeks feature a mishmash of imagery not discernible from such close range.

This concludes our audio tour of the Royal Ontario Museum's Tattoos of the World.