

Tattoo: An Illustrated Miscellany



Legendary London tattoo artist and a collector himself for over 35 years, Lal Hardy takes us on a tour of private archives, including his own extensive collection, revealing the fascinating hidden world of tattoo. Skin-marking practices, which still retain their frisson of danger, threat, oddity and romance, unite inner-city tattoo artists in Britain with the ancient tribal customs of peoples such as the Maori and Ainu on the other side of the globe. Everyone who has been tattooed is a collector of sorts, as suggested by D. Angus Vail in the title of his 1999 article, Tattoos are like potato chips - you can't have just one: the process of becoming and being a collector. The collectors of the objects in this book have assembled their cabinets of curiosities as items of interest to be hoarded, treasured, displayed and discussed. Despite the small holdings at London's Horniman Museum and later acquisitions by institutions such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, most museums, galleries and research centres have paid little attention to Western tattooing, seeing it as curious at best, degenerate at worst. Collections of tattoo equipment, inks and designs of European and American tattoo artists are as a result almost entirely in private hands; tattoo artists and their clients cared passionately about tattooing when very few institutions did. Some artists' collections were huge and they housed them in museums they created. Lyle Tuttle in San Francisco, Hanky Panky in Amsterdam, Lionel Titchener in the UK, and Japanese tattoo legend Horiyoshi III, who founded the Yokohama Tattoo Museum, were among the first to do this. Many old-time artists simply worked with what they had: hand-made machines, hand-painted designs and travelling kits and so on. These items, along with the collections of artists who have retired or died, have become much

sought after. Tattoo is a treasure trove of tattoo curiosities that document much of tattooing's past: paraphernalia and ephemera such as badges, passes, business cards and signs, historical images of stencils and flashes, equipment, and art. Much of the content of the book was specially shot in private collections, not open to the public. It also celebrates the passionate interest of the dedicated collectors who have allowed us to explore, often for the first time, their collections.

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