



The Polynesian Tattoo Today

Tricia Allen, 2010
 Honolulu: Mutual Publishing
 Full color, 6x9"; 285 pages. Price \$22.95
 <www.thepolynesiantattootoday.com>

Review by Georgia Lee

The Polynesian Tattoo Today is divided into three parts: The Art; Featured Artists; and Artists' Contacts. In the Preface, Allen describes the selection process for the 216 images selected for the book: they were chosen solely on artistic merit without taking into account ethnicity or locale of the artist. And they are beautiful. Full color pictures include close up shots of the tattoo designs as well as full body shots.

Allen's Introduction points out that it is inappropriate to take an exact copy of a design, either ancient or modern, for a tattoo. The design should be modified, thus making it a unique creation. The most popular tattoo style today is pan-Polynesian, that is, a hybrid style borrowing from numerous island groups. Allen tackles the difficult question of what defines a Polynesian tattoo and concludes that there is no easy answer. She stresses the importance of passing down the knowledge of the ancient practice of tattoo.

Section One, "The Art" contains 214 glorious full color photographs of tattoo on various buff bodies, male and female. Section Two, "Featured Artists" contains photographs of the artists, ranging from Tahiti and Rapa Nui to the Marquesas to New Zealand and Hawai'i; Samoa as well as the Solomon Islands are included. Tattoo artists also can be found from Canada, Holland, France and Switzerland to New Hampshire!

While the images in Section One are stunning, Section Two brings to life the artists and gives insight into how they became interested in the practice of tattoo. The stories and images of the artists are fascinating as a record of practitioners of tattoo today, both Polynesian and non. The backgrounds of several of the artists are pan-Polynesian; in addition to tattoo, many practice other cultural arts such as music

and dance. Some still use traditional methods of tattooing. Many share the philosophy of the importance of design, as well as the sentiment that the revival of tattoo as a visual art is as important as that of language revival. The final section of the book includes an artist contact list.

Allen's last book, *Tattoo Traditions of Hawai'i* (2006) wove together ancient and contemporary tattoo, and its artists. In this volume, while mention is made of ancient designs and practices, the focus is on the art and technical ability of the artists. Allen, whose background includes anthropology as well as contemporary tattoo and is, herself, a gifted tattoo artist, has compiled an amazing collection of photographs illustrating the tattoo designs and the artists who created them. Anyone interested in the subject of tattoo should have this book in their library!

PUBLICATIONS

- Gewertz, Deborah and Frederick Errington. 2010. *Cheap Meat: Flap Food Nations in the Pacific Islands*. University of California Press. 224 pages.
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- Mieth Andreas and Hans-Rudolf Bork. 2010. Humans, climate or introduced rats – which is to blame for the woodland destruction on prehistoric Rapa Nui (Easter Island)? *Journal of Archaeological Science* 32(2):417-426.
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- Thompson, Christina. 2009. *Come on Shore and We Will Kill You and Eat You All: A New Zealand Story*. Bloomsbury, USA. 288 pages.
- The University of Auckland Library and JSP have now digitized the first 100 years. Vols 1-100 (1892-1992). The project has keyword-searchable texts and links to images of the original pages.
<http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/index.php>

