

## Regionale24

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### Galerie II: *Tattoos, Kunst auf dem Körper, Gruppenausstellung*

In the group exhibition *Tattoos, Art on the Body*, artists explore the skin as a medium and membrane. The surface of the human body is one of the oldest carrier of signs. Ritual body painting has been known since prehistoric times. Tattooing as body adornment, artistic experimental practice, expression of lifestyle or permanent inscription of identity has become most widespread in recent decades.

#### 1. Anna Gohmert, *Schatten der Antike*, 2010

In her photographs, Anna Gohmert draws attention to the skin as a sensitive medium that conveys identity. Her photos document the sun tattoos that the artist had burnt on her skin as part of her 2010 street art performance *Shadows of Antiquity* in Rome. To do this, she covered certain parts of her body with miniature stencils of classical sights of the Eternal City and had them drawn as negative shapes by the sun. With the "tattoo installation", the artist internalised the tourist experience as a fetish of the appropriation of icons. By incorporating the cityscape as a simple wallpapering material, the artist has created an artificial body. As a result, the artist's body is exposed as a canvas, a surface, a structure, an image-forming material and a hardwearing fabric. The ephemeral sun tattoos emphasise thus the changeability and plasticity, as well as the "unrepresentability" of her own identity.

#### 2. Kollektiv [ein]FARBIG (Heiko Hacker, Sara-Lena Möllenkamp), *The Gap*, 2023

In the video *The Gap*, photos of tattoos designed and tattooed by the [ein]FARBIG Tattoo Studio<sup>1</sup> in Freiburg are put together as a slide show. They show people of different ages and social backgrounds with large tattoos. The motifs are often adapted to the anatomy of the body part on which they are applied such as the dotwork<sup>2</sup> tattoo above the knee. The human skeleton tattooed in relief on the back of a young woman in *Gap* testifies to the highest level of craftsmanship. As a reference to the depiction of a grim reaper in medieval dance of death cycles, it plays with art historical references. Tools and colour palettes as well as the durability of the ink, are constantly improving, so that the artistic sophistication of tattoos is constantly increasing. The work *The Gap* makes it clear that tattoos have definitely transcended the boundaries of subculture and have arrived in the mainstream. However, the work also visualises the artistic potential of the art on the skin.

The soundtrack features interviews with tattooed people who talk about their motivation for getting a tattoo. They repeatedly return to the importance of the relationship with the tattoo artist. For

1 (Daniel (blacklinedots), Heiko (Heiko Hacker), Stefan (sdl\_one)).

2 Based on Impressionism and Pointillism, dots are strung together to form detailed shapes, filigree patterns and lines.

[ein]FARBIG, a tattoo is always the result of the interaction between the tattoo artist and the tattooed person, which arises from a joint dialogue. After all, "a tattoo is a joint act of body modification, the body becomes a mouldable part of the tattooed person's identity. It is a form of living art that focuses on the human body, the skin, as the central medium," as the collective writes.

## 7. Henry Althaus

Althaus' paintings depict young women with tattoos from the late 2010s. They are based on sketches that the artist made from observations in cafés in Bern. Althaus is interested in tattoos as an expression of self-presentation. With his compositions, he attempts to highlight the visual self-expression that the figures celebrate with their tattoos.

In the image **Coming in (7.2)**, for example, Althaus mirrors the young woman's rebellious self-presentation, which emanates from piercings and tattoos, in the bending walls. With stars and anchors, she wears two so-called "old-school motifs". They originate from old sailor tattoos, but formed an own style in the tattoo scene since the late 1990s. The five-pointed star tattoos also became known as "Rihanna stars" in 2008.

## 6. Nadine Cueni, 17 Fragen an dich, 2023

The installation with the glitter curtain evokes intimacy besides the atmosphere of tattoo studios in the 1970s. In the video, the artist's hand turns over photos of tattooed people from the book **1000 Tattoos**. As a female element, her red-painted fingernails refer to the fact that tattooing was mainly a male domain until the 1970s.

The photos document the history of tattoos from the post-war period to the 1980s. Cueni's selection shows the historical milieus of tattoo culture, with which it is sometimes prejudicially associated to this day: Soldiers, freaks or rocker motorbike club members. Cueni attempts to break up the sometimes harsh, difficult to recognise appearance of the tattooed men by superimposing her questions on the pictures.

The photo in Cueni's installation shows the naked, unmarked upper body of a boy next to the fully tattooed torso of an adult. This juxtaposition continues examining the significance of skin as a form of communication.

## 3. David Muth, Zeichnungen unter Haut, 2023

At the centre of the installation is a tattoo table with VR glasses. In **POV of a Tattoo (3.3)** a back tattoo is filmed. On the table are also two tattooed latex mats **Untitled (3.4)** with Muth's previously designed tattoo motifs. With the latex mask **Face Recognition (3.10)**, Muth reflects on how tattoos are tied to the lifespan of the human body.

For **Works of a Decade (3.1)**, Muth incorporated used matrix papers into light boxes. The artist used these papers to transfer his motifs onto the bodies for tattooing.

In the new paintings **Day Dream (3.2)**, the artist has combined tattoo and painting for the first time. To do this, he prepared the canvases with so-called "stencil primer". This is used to coat the skin for the motif transfer. Muth imprinted used matrix paper with his tattoo motifs onto the prepared canvases.

Walls and ghosts are omnipresent in Muth's paintings and tattoos. Walls refer to both, confinement and protection. In **Reality Cut (3.9)** and **Untitled (3.9)**, the rigid wall elements are transformed into flowing organic forms, thus giving away their ambiguity.

Many of Muth's ghosts appear as flowing bodies with two eyeholes, as in **Untitled (3.6)** or **Both Worlds are Close (3.8)**. Others already have a human body as in **Untitled (3.11)**. If they appear

naked, they are often tattooed, as in *They Meet, They Hide and They Seek* (3.12). Their expression is rigid or threatening. Muth's ghosts never appear cute or endearing.

#### 4. Pauline Gosselin, *Dating Anfrage*, 2023

Pauline Gosselin takes up the subcultural style as an art form with her murals. Tattoos, like graffiti, operate in the field of tension between 'high and low', between high art and popular culture.

#### 5. Tiago Francez

In Tiago Francez's works *A Mathematical Paradox (Family Portrait)* (5.1) and *Freymann* (5.2), the tattoo machine is used as an artistic tool. Comparable to a drypoint technique used in printmaking, the artist uses the machine to engrave black and white areas of an ultrasound image onto PVC skin. In the age of digital laser prints, the materiality and physicality of the printing process is important to the artist. The process of creating *Léna et la Petite Souris* (5.3) is documented in video.

In Francez's works, the tattooing of PVC draws attention to the skin as a membrane between inside and outside. PVC is used as thermal insulation in house construction has the artist the same function as skin. Both are sensitive to environmental influences and touch. Like skin, PVC registers every scratch as small scars.

#### 8. Areum Yoon

Areum Yoon's *Selbstporträt Serie* (8.4), delicately painted in oil pastel and acrylic, revolves around tattoos as decorative embellishments and patterns. Tattoos are often designed to embody emotional experience. As someone living in a foreign society, the artist sometimes feels like an ornament in the crowd, perceived as a pattern rather than an individual.

The examination of ornaments therefore plays an important role in Yoon's artistic practice and manifests itself, for example, in *Tiles IX* (8.3) from her *Tile series*. In her *Selbstporträt Serie* (8.4) Areum Yoon uses seemingly paradoxically fine lined tattooed ornaments to express her individuality. The question of what it means to be at home is raised in *Plural Possessive / Singular Possessive* (8.1). For the artist, our body is our house as well as our home.

#### 9. Damien Juillard, *Repetitive Strain Injuries*, 2023

Damien Juillard's work plays with the idea of the unique, the original and the copy. To this end, he has photographed a negative version of an existing print. The work shows a flesh scan on a mobile phone display and a mirror that reflects and duplicates the elements.

With this work, the artist explores the significance of images. To what extent can "a body and its image become a commodity?" How can "images be staged performatively"?

The mirror motif brings the role of images in the formation of the self into play. According to Jacques Lacan's idea of the mirror stage, we can only establish our self through the encounter with our own image in the mirror. Are tattoos comparable to second self-images that stabilise our identity? In a time when everything is fluid and relative? Could this explain why tattoos are currently so omnipresent?

Heidi Brunnschweiler, November 2023