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The Traditional Arts of the Altered Body

Graphic arts by Alex Morgan

These are graphics created from images of traditional altered bodies from the period of empire expansion and colonization by western governments in Catherine Cartwright-Jones’ collection of original post cards and photographs. Most of these images are from between 1890 and 1920, photographed in the colonial possessions and sold to colonists, tourists, and occupying troupes, were meant to be carried or mailed back to Europe and the USA. During this period, the colonial powers identified, categorized, mapped and counted the people they had colonized, emphasizing how “different” they were as a function of political policy. The messages carried by these images shape our ideas today about what is “civilized” and what is “barbaric”, what is “cooperative” and what is “defiant” ... and what are the traditional arts of the altered body.

Adorn

Adornment alters a body temporarily: adornment usually has a significance meant by the wearer, and understood by the viewer, intended for communication in a specific place and time.

People alter their bodies with adornment

- With symbols that can be changed to suit circumstances
- To communicate wealth and worth
- For protection against a perceived temporary threat, such as a lucky charm.
- To establish a temporary connection with supernatural forces, such as a magical pouch or religious icon.
- To mark marital status, kinship, or social affiliation which may be discarded if the relationship ends
- To extend or enhance a body’s function in a particular situation, such as glasses, wristwatch, or Bluetooth headsets
- To show a cultural affiliation or defiance, which might change as one’s situation changes



An Ouled Nayl and her Wealth
Adorn1



Mother and Child from Nepal
Adorn2



Algerian Princess Adorned
Adorn3



Two women from Algeria: A Princess and a Beauty Contest Winner
Adorn 4



An Adorned Woman with her Daily Textile Work
Adorn5



A Sorceress from Dahomey Performs a Ceremony with Adornment that Protects and Connects Her to Supernatural Powers
Adorn7



A Sorceress from Dahomey Performs a Ceremony with Adornment that Protects and Connects Her to Supernatural Powers
Adorn8



An Ouled Nayl Adorned with Her Wealth
Adorn9



An Ouled Nayl Adorned with Her Wealth
Adorn9B



An Ouled Nayl Adorned with Her Wealth
Adorn9c



Two Ouled Nayl Adorned with Their Wealth
Adorn10



Two Ouled Nayl Adorned with Their Wealth
Adorn10b



Two Ouled Nayl Adorned with Their Wealth
Adorn10c



An Adorned Panamanian Woman in the Market: Piercings, Beads and Gold
Adorn11

What adornment are you wearing today?

What does it tell people about you?

Compress

A person can easily alter the shape of their soft tissue with a shaping garment, and with more effort can permanently alter the shape of cartilage and bones. These alterations can a person's mobility, and thus exempt a person from strenuous labor, or enlist other persons to "do things for them."

- The small bones of the feet can be compressed and shaped if the compression is begun in childhood, before the internal structures harden. This was used to raise a female to very high social status, and the permanently compressed foot was privileged and admired.
- People may compress their feet temporarily with shoes to display prestige, authority, or femininity: with shoes, feet may be reshaped to suit a situation.
- Breasts, waists and buttocks can be temporarily compressed, altered to an idealistically feminized shape: shaping may communicate modesty and self control, or flaunt femininity.
- Lower ribs may be compressed to shape an extreme waist, and with prolonged compression, the shaping may be permanent.
- Compression and shaping may alter the ability to move freely, mirroring social norms for behavior.



Shanghai Woman with Bound Feet
Compress 1



Upper Class Chinese Woman and Girls with Bound Feet
Compress 2



American Dancers with Shaped Feet
Compress 3



Women with Compressed Torsos
Compress 4



American Woman with Girdled Torso
Compress 5



Rebellious Woman with Shaped Feet and Stockings
Compress 6



Rebellious Woman with Shaped Feet and Stockings
Compress 6b



Elegant Woman with Compressed Waist
Compress 7

What shoes are you wearing today?

How do your shoes change the way you experience walking, running and standing?

Cover/Reveal

A person may selectively cover or reveal parts of their body.

- The decision to cover or reveal may reflect the preference of the person, and it may reflect the authority of and respect for social norms and family.
- A person may choose to reveal as an act of rebellion against social norms, or as an expression of power or implied intimacy.
- A person may choose to cover as an act of maintaining privacy and privilege.
- A government may regulate the extent to which a person's body is covered or revealed. A person may rebel against this regulation.



Veiled Egyptian Women
Cover 1



Algerian Woman
Cover 2



Veiled Women, Egypt and Iran
Cover 03



Women and their Daughters in Iran
Cover 4



Dancers in the USA
Cover 5



Women Covered and Revealed
Cover 06

Gender

Male and female are not immutable polar opposites. Some societies believe there are three or more sexes.

- There is a range of physical characteristics which societies may polarize as male and female.
- Many physical characteristics are sexually ambiguous, these may be altered.
- There are a range of behaviors which societies may polarize as male and female, and a person may not perform the behaviors that coincide with their physical characteristics.
- A person's biological characteristics may be both, or neither, male or female.
- A person may alter their body to cooperate with, reject, or subvert social norms for sexual identity.



Madame Delait and Stylish Young American Men
Gender



A Woman in Pittsburgh, USA
Gender 2



Village Wives in Philippines
Gender 3

Hair

Hair is easily altered. Its structure and color varies more across genetic groups than bones, muscles, or even skin. It may be altered, cut, grown, and altered again.

- Hair alteration may communicate membership, gender, and status within a social group
- Hair may be differently altered for celebration or everyday labor.
- Hair changes as a person ages: graying hair may be altered to achieve the appearance of youth
- Complex hair alterations require the assistance of another person, so may involve exchange of goods or social relationships. Mutual grooming is a sociable mammal behavior that reduces stress within the group.
- Hair may be altered to communicate rejection of social norms.
- A person of one genetic type may alter their hair to emulate the hair of another genetic type.
- Hair may be altered as a form of punishment: a head may be involuntarily shaved
- Hair may be selectively altered on different parts of the body: some areas allowed growing and other parts shaved. Hair removal be required or prohibited by religion.



A Woman with Braided Hair
from Sudan
Hair 1



“Beggar” Girl with Long Hair
Hair 2



“Beggar” Girl with Long Hair
Hair 2b



Woman from Cameroun with
Decorative Scars and Shaped hair
Hair 3



Japanese Woman’s Shaped Hair
Hair 4



A Woman Grooms Another
Woman’s Hair
Hair 5



Madame Delait and a Beauty
Contest Winner
Hair 6



Madame Delait and a Child with
Long Hair
Hair 6b



Madame Delait and Shaved Men
Hair 6c



Fashionable Young Clean Shaven Men from Pittsburgh, USA
Hair 7



Girl and Woman with Arranged Hair
Hair 8



Girl and Woman with Arranged Hair and Lipstick
Hair 8b



Madame Delait and Girl with Red Hair: Gender, Hair and Puberty
Hair 8c

Did you look in the mirror and arrange your hair today?

Did you remove some hair and allow other hair to grow?

Inscribe

Pigment may be pierced into the skin to inscribe permanent images.

- The inscriptions may be placed to be read by the public or only in private
- The inscriptions may signal cooperation and affiliation with a group
- The inscriptions may signal rebellion and rejection of or from a group
- The inscriptions may be written with the intention to engage others in the narrative.
- The inscription may be understood or misinterpreted, with different consequences.
- The inscription may be involuntary- applied as a punishment
- The inscription may be a social narrative- applied to prove membership in a group
- The inscription may be private narrative- a memory of an event or relationship
- Tattoos may be forbidden by a religion
- Tattoos may be an expression of a religion
- Inscriptions may be intended to provide supernatural protection.
- Inscriptions on exposed skin elicit reactions (intended and unintended) from the onlooker which change the interactions between an individual and the group.



Yakuza
Inscribe 1



American Sailors, WWII
Inscribe 4



Cindy Ray: Tattooed Woman
Inscribe 5



A “Tattooed Lady” Traveling with a Circus
Inscribe 6



Man with Military Tattoo
Inscribe 7



A Woman from California, 1948, with a Butterfly Tattoo
Inscribe 8



Girlfriends, and an Encyclopedic Illustration of a Japanese Tattoo
Inscribe9



A Formosan Woman Applies a Facial Tattoo
Inscribe10



Woman from Ouida with “Modern” Tattoos
Inscribe11

Paint

Body paints are the most commonly used alteration, and often used to enhance facial features for temporary expressive effect, or to emulate a cultural ideal of beauty.

- Carbon, collected from smoke, is one of the most universal sources of black body markings. Other minerals, such as iron, calcium and copper bearing earths, have been gathered and worked into paints with plant and animal fats to create body art since the Neolithic period.
- Some eye colorants, such as those based on antimony (some varieties of kohl) have a short term anti-microbial benefit, but a long term health risk from lead poisoning.
- Turmeric and lime provide an array of bright yellow and red colors, used for ceremony and ritual in South and Southeast Asia
- Commercial cosmetics are often a symbol of status and privilege because of their rarity and expense.
- Cosmetics can be used to construct or alter gender and race, and to emulate a cultural ideal of beauty.
- Lips are frequently altered with cosmetic paint to manage expressions of emotion.
- Eyes and eyebrows are frequently emphasized to manage expressions of emotion.



Eyebrow and Cheek Paint on an Ouled Nayl Woman
Paint1



Lipstick and Mascara as “War Paint” to Enhance Beauty
Paint2



Paint, Tatting and Henna on a Young Ouled Nayl
Paint3



Tunisian Women with Painted Eyebrows
Paint 4



Tunisian Women with Painted Eyebrows
Paint 5



Ouled Nayl Women with Painted Eyes and Eyebrows
Paint 6



Ouled Nayl Women with Painted Eyes and Eyebrows
Paint 6b

People may alter their eyebrows, eyes, and lips to enhance emotional expressiveness and manage communication.

Other people may alter their face to obscure emotional expression.

TAAB Pierce

Some areas of skin may be pierced to insert an ornament. Once the piercing has healed around the object, the ornament may be removed, reinserted, or a new ornament inserted.

- The piercing may communicate the person's willingness to undergo discomfort to permanently display affiliation in a group or position in social hierarchy.
- More extreme piercing may communicate higher position in a social hierarchy.



Young Woman with Decorative Scarring and Piercing
Pierce 1



Young Woman with Decorative Scarring and Piercing
Pierce 2



Old and Young Sumatran Women with Pierced, Adorned Ears
Pierce 3



Young Dyak Woman with Pierced, Adorned Ears
Pierce 4



Young Dyak Woman with Pierced, Adorned Ears
Pierce 5

More women than men are pierced.

More men than women are tattooed.

Scar

Ornamental scars can be created on persons who are genetically prone to keloid formation. Skin is deeply cut, then irritants are rubbed into the open wound to encourage the formation of a raised scar.

- Scars may mark the person's willingness to endure pain to be accepted as an adult member of a group
- Scars done on girls' breast and bellies will expand during future pregnancies, so that instead of random stretch marks, culturally significant and aesthetically pleasing patterns ornament their expanding skin.



Young Woman with Ornamental Scars
Scar1



Daelima Man with Ornamental Scars
Scar2



Man and Woman with Ornamental Scars
Scar3



Man and Woman with Ornamental Scars
Scar3b



Man and Woman with Ornamental Scars
Scar4



Man and Woman with Ornamental Scars
Scar4b



Young Woman from Chad with Ornamental Scars
Scar5



Belly Scars on Woman from Ivory Coast
Scar7



Women with Ornamental Scars
Scar8



Women with Ornamental Scars
Scar8b

There is evidence of people wearing ornamental scarring from 8,000 BCE in Morocco.

What do your surgical, accidental, and deliberate scars, tell people about you?

Stain

Skin staining is relatively complex. Only a few dyes will safely stain skin, and only a few dye molecules will penetrate skin without a mordant or heat.

- Henna, indigo, woad, genipap, turmeric, walnut, and a few other natural plant dyes will stain skin.
- Stained skin will exfoliate in three to thirty days, so stains are not permanent.
- The duration of an event or action may correspond with the duration of the stain: when the stain is gone, the event is over or the action is complete.
- Stains may be applied in culturally significant patterns for protection or luck.
- The dyes that stain skin may have other characteristics: they may strengthen, be a sun block, insect repellent, or anti-bacterial.
- Very complex stain patterns may be reserved for important occasions or important people.



Egyptian and Tunisian Dancers
with Hennaed hands
Stain 1



Ouled Nayl with Hennaed Hands
and Arm, Kohl and Tattoos
Stain 2



Ouled Nayl with Hennaed Hands
and Arm, Kohl and Tattoos
Stain 2b



Ouled Nayl with Jewels,
Hennaed Hands and Arm, Kohl
and Tattoos
Stain 3



Stain 6
Chaco Woman with Genipap
Stain 6



Ouled Nayl with Jewels,
Hennaed Hands and Arm, Kohl
and Tattoos
Stain 8



Young Ouled Nayl with Hennaed
Hands and Arm, Kohl and
Tattoos
Stain 9

**When you were a child, did you try staining your skin
with berries or walnut husks?**

Stretch

Some areas of skin can be gradually stretched to accommodate adornment: lips and earlobes are best adapted to stretching.

- Extreme stretching may be admired for the risk and patience required, and may be a mark of high social status.
- Specialized adornments assist the stretching: weight or girth is gradually increased as the skin is elongated.
- Extreme stretching and ornamentation may require reduced activity, thus removing the person from some laborious tasks into a more sheltered, privileged, “kept” life.
- Some stretching is begun at the onset of a period of transition and the completion indicates the arrival at a new status, such as beginning a process at puberty and completing it for marriage.
- Greater stretching and larger ornaments may be added to reflect greater achievement or prestige. Minimal stretching and fewer ornaments may indicate a person of lower prestige or achievement.
- Extreme stretching may be unsuccessful: if blood supply does not extend with the elongating tissue, that area of skin may decay. Extreme stretching may be unsuccessful: the tissue may tear if the stretching is too rapid: a perfectly achieved elongation may be greatly admired.
- Bones and cartilage can be shaped but not elongated. These structures can be easily shaped in childhood when they are still growing and malleable, but not when the bones harden with maturation.



A Zulu Woman
Stretch 1



A Young Dancer from Bali
Emulates a Supernatural Being
Stretch 2



A Young Woman from Malaysia
with Stretched Ear Lobes
Stretch3



Man from Borneo Relaxes with a
Cigarette
Stretch 4



Child and Woman from Malaysia
with Stretched Ear Lobes
Stretch 5



Marinds Man from New Guinea
Stretch 6



Tamil Woman from Ceylon with
her Adornment
Stretch7

There are areas of tourism where people pay to visit and photograph indigenous people with extreme body modifications such as lip plates and neck rings.

Weight

People alter their bodies by deliberately gaining or losing weight

- The expanded body may communicate desirability, beauty, wealth and worth in a society where scarcity is frequent and feared.
- The muscular, athletic body may communicate beauty, strength and power in a society where weakness and powerlessness is frequent and feared.
- The exercised, lithe body may communicate affluence and leisure in an industrialized, urbanized society where lower class people have little opportunity for outdoor recreation.
- A person may gain weight, or increase the size and muscularity of their upper body and shoulders to have an appearance of greater authority and power.
- Weight gain is often associated with motherhood and fertility; in some cultures, a thin bride or wife reflects poorly on her family.
- A person may restrict weight to maintain a fragile-appearing, child-like body.
- Body size and shape is genetically pre-disposed, and people whose bodies do not naturally conform to the prevailing social ideal may be scorned.
- Areas of the body may be selectively increased or decreased to approach a cultural ideal: breasts may be reduced or augmented, buttocks may be enhanced or flattened, and musculature may be increased or softened.



A Young Jewish Tunisian
Woman
Weight2



A Tunisian Jewish Dancer
Weight3



German Men and Woman
Exercising
Weight4



Woman in Bathing Costume
Weight5



A Young Tunisian Jewish
Woman
Weight6



Tunisian Jewish Women
Weight7

How did YOU alter YOUR body today?

Images from The Henna Page Calendars

Body art by Catherine Cartwright-Jones, Photography by Roy Jones, Graphic Arts by Alex Morgan



From Mehndi Masala by Kim Brennan: Henna and Gilding
Masala8



From Finding Blue by Catherine Cartwright-Jones: Ancient Blue Wounding.
Findblu8



From Mela Magic by Neeta Sharma and Henna for the Aspiring Artist by Alissa Hall: Henna and Gilding
Mela-asp8



From Sangeet by Neeta Sharma: Harqus and Gilding
Sangeet8



From Warrior by Alex Morgan: Henna and Gilding
Warrior8



From Ancient Blue by Alex Morgan: Ancient Blue Wounding.
Ancblu8



From La Belly Luna by Justine Howland-Goodwin: Henna and Gilding
Lunabelly8



From Love Mehndi by Kiran Sahib: Henna and Gilding
Love8



From Aloha by Deborah Brommer: Henna and Gilding
Aloha8



From Alex Morgan's Spain: Henna and Gilding
Spain8



From Glory of Henna by Deepali Deshpande: Henna and Gilding
Glory8



From Origin by Alex Morgan: Harqus and Gems
Origin8



From Tulips of Topkapi by Alex Morgan: Henna and Gilding
Tulip8



From Aloha by Deborah Brommer: Henna and Gilding
Aloha7



From Ancient Blue by Alex Morgan: Henna and Wounding
Ancblue7



From Arabesque by Jessica McQueen: Henna and Gilding
Arabesq7



From Mehendi by Dipti Desai: Henna and Gilding
Dipti7



From Glory of Henna by Deepali Deshpande: Henna and Gilding
Glory7



From La Belly Luna by Justine Howland Goodwin: Henna and Gilding
Bellyluna7



From Love Mehendi by Kiran Sahib: Ancient Blue Wounding
Love7



From Henna for the Aspiring Artist by Alissa Hall
Aspiring7



From Mehendi Masala by Kim Brennan: Henna and Gilding
Masala7



From Origin by Alex Morgan: Harquus
Origin7



From Sangeet by Neeta Sharma: Henna and Gilding
Sangeet7



From Tulips of Topkapi by Alex Morgan: Henna and Gilding
Tulips7



From Warrior by Alex Moran: Henna, Gilding and Turmeric
Warrior7

At Defiance Tattoos



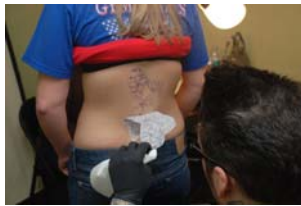
Rob Pierces
Rob



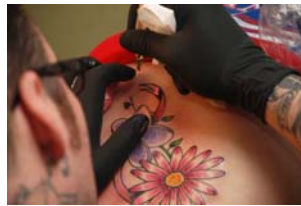
Tattoos
Steve



Trevor Tattoos
Trevor



Trevor transfers Samantha's pattern.
2260



Trevor shades in the colors on Samantha's flowers.
2472



After nearly four hours, Samantha is fully inked.
2477



Place the needle.
2530



The body responds.
2534



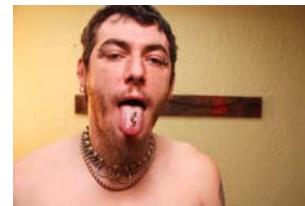
Tend the area.
2537



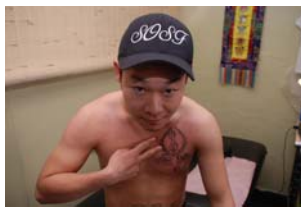
I altered my body today.
2540



My altered body pleases me.
2543



I alter my body to defy you.
2651



I inscribe my social connections.
2662

Roy Jones photographed the artists at Defiance Tattoo in Kent, Ohio, USA. Rob is their staff piercer, Steve and Trevor do tattoo work. Most of their clients are college students at the nearby university, and their shop is usually busy. The clients we saw did not come in on impulse, they had carefully thought about how they wanted to alter their bodies. Each person expected to engage other people through the narrative of their body: some alterations were intended to communicate rejection of social norms, others were intended to designate them as a member of an "outsider" group, and others simply told their personal story.

