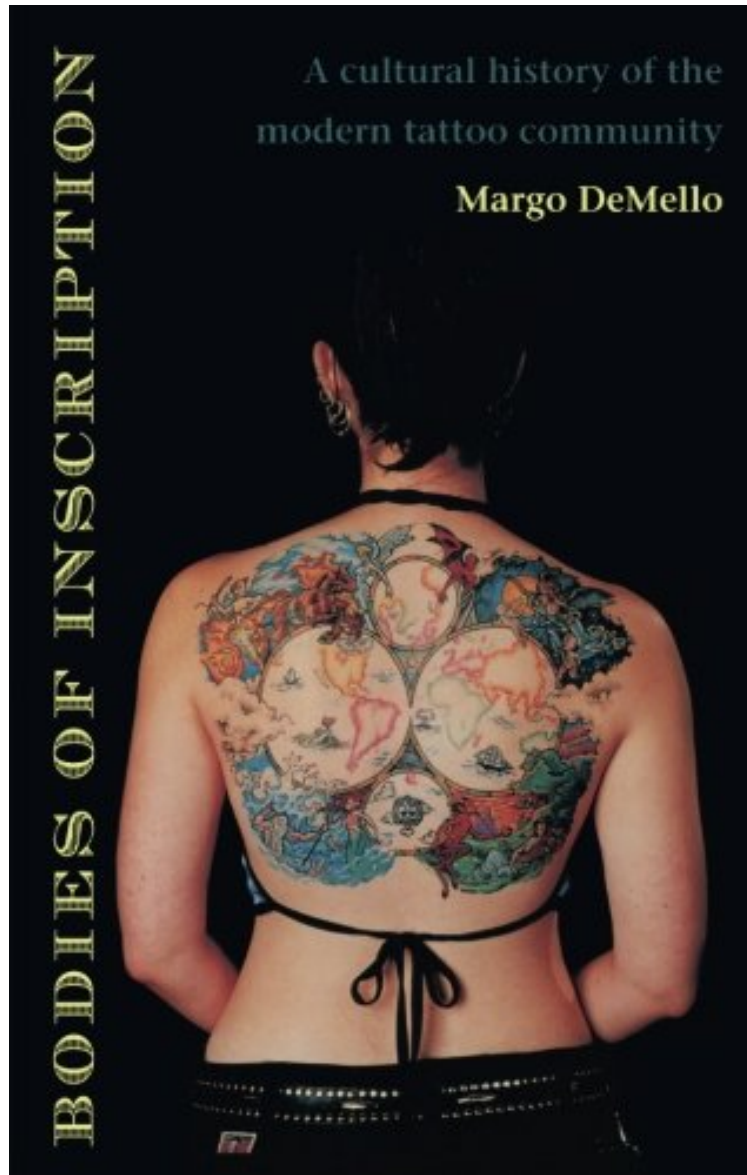


Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community

Margo DeMello

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Margo DeMello : Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Bodies of Inscription is a great book if you're looking for information on the subculture ...By MeganBodies of Inscription is a great book if you're looking for information on the subculture of tattoos. It features an extensive history for a whole chapter, which was a fairly large fraction of the book. It doesn't go back as far as other tattoos books go though. It starts when the Western world began to see it in the 1700s. Another comparison between this and other tattoo books is her writing. Some use scientific vernacular while others are more layman's terms. I enjoyed that she was the latter. I like that she talked to people who are members of the tattoo community and not just used examples from magazines. She says that the two most popular ways of being in the community is through tattoo conventions and magazines. As a tattooed person who isn't involved in either, I now understand why I've never felt a sense of community. The one convention I go to has a tattoo part of it and I've never been involved. This book definitely helped give insight into the subculture that I could be a part of. I found it amusing that some older tattooed people found the whole thing crazy. I would think they would be seen as elders in the group. One thing that bothered me is her focus on the middle-class tattooed person. What about the lower and upper class tattooed people? I feel like they should be included, too.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. better books out thereBy John ScalzoFor the time that this book was written it was a good concise portrait of tattoo culture from a very aware upper middle class view point. out of date book but good for obtaining a background knowledge of tattoo culture.18 of 23 people found the following review helpful. A bit too elitistBy selkie1964Ms. DeMello spends too much time acting as her own apologist as she explains how she acquired "insider" status in the tattoo community while still remaining an impartial observer. One thing I found particularly objectionable in her book was her apparent opinion, insinuated several times, that only women with "the body beautiful" should get tattoos (much less display them in public -- horrors!) As a woman (liberated, one assumes), Ms. DeMello should know better. This is one book which is going to end up in a used bookstore rather than in my collection.

Since the 1980s, tattooing has emerged anew in the United States as a widely appealing cultural, artistic, and social form. In *Bodies of Inscription* Margo DeMello explains how elite tattooists, magazine editors, and leaders of tattoo organizations have downplayed the working-class roots of tattooing in order to make it more palatable for middle-class consumption. She shows how a completely new set of meanings derived primarily from non-Western cultures has been created to give tattoos an exotic, primitive flavor. Community publications, tattoo conventions, articles in popular magazines, and DeMello's numerous interviews illustrate the interplay between class, culture, and history that orchestrated a shift from traditional Americana and biker tattoos to new forms using Celtic, tribal, and Japanese images. DeMello's extensive interviews reveal the divergent yet overlapping communities formed by this class-based, American-style repackaging of the tattoo. After describing how the tattoo has moved from a mark of patriotism or rebellion to a symbol of exploration and status, the author returns to the predominantly middle-class movement that celebrates its skin art as spiritual, poetic, and self-empowering. Recognizing that the term community cannot capture the variations and class conflict that continue to thrive within the larger tattoo culture, DeMello finds in the discourse of tattooed people and their artists a new and particular sense of community and explores the unexpected relationship between this discourse and that of other social movements. This ethnography of tattooing in America makes a substantive contribution to the history of tattooing in addition to relating how communities form around particular traditions and how the traditions themselves change with the introduction of new participants. *Bodies of Inscription* will have broad appeal and will be enjoyed by readers interested in cultural studies, American studies, sociology, popular culture, and body art.

From *Library Journal*DeMello (formerly with Univ. of California, Davis) presents an anthropological study of tattooing and tattoo communities in North America. Both a researcher and a "tattooed person" who is married to a tattooist--both "insider and outsider," that is--she describes the rigid hierarchies within tattoo communities (how tattooists jealously guard secrets from outsiders and newcomers) and engages in a broader analysis of tattoos as socioeconomic indicators. She looks at the meaning of tattoos among bikers, Chicano gangs, middle-class baby boomers, and Generation X. Modern, elite tattooists, she argues, downplay tattooing's lower-class roots in favor of new "middle-class consumption." And whereas baby boomers' traditional tattoo designs--which most now want to hide--featured lifestyle, patriotism, love, and memorable events, Generation X youth proudly display more "exotic" and "primitive" designs. An interesting, authentic account of tattoo communities; recommended for all libraries.-Chogollah Maroufi, California State Univ., Los Angeles Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.From *Booklist*Although academic, this book has much to recommend it for general collections. The tattoo community of which DeMello writes--and in which she participates--is demographically quite different from the old. It is more female, more middle-class, and more educated, whereas the earlier society of tattoo collectors was primarily working class and male. DeMello lays out some of the social history of tattooing to prepare for her discussion of the changes in tattooing in the past 20 years. From handpicked prison tattoos to the latest in today's "tribal" design, from gang symbols to feminist ones, tattoos themselves have changed to meet changing consumer demand. Some of the tensions among social groups for whom tattoos have dramatically different meanings are documented, but DeMello's major

interest is in describing the new community of tattooed people, both men and women, for whom new meanings are being forged from the meeting of skin and ink. Patricia Monaghan From Kirkus spaper 0-8223-2467-9 Nonprofit fundraiser and tattoo enthusiast DeMello offers an academic account of the history and evolution of body tattoos and their sociocultural roles through the years. Tattooing in North America originated with voyages to the Pacific islands in the 17th and 18th centuries, when explorers encountered tattooing in the cultures of Tahiti, Polynesia, and New Zealand. The European explorers borrowed the native islanders designs along with their practice, and soon what was thought of as works by savages became more widely accepted. Sailors tattoos were regarded as an exotic symbol of an adventurous, free-spirited lifestyle that appealed to the European working class; tattooed men and women became popular attractions at freak shows. But it was during the period between the two World Wars, the Golden Age of Tattooing, that tattooing achieved its highest level of social approval when the designs became more patriotic in tone. In the postwar years, tattoos were viewed negatively as a form of defiance for such marginal subcultures as bikers, gangstas, and hippies. Today, mainstream acceptance has been won through the work of elite tattoo artists, the popular media, Internet newsgroups, Generation X-ers, and leaders of the tattoo community. Describing the leading designs and sources of inspiration, and considering how an individuals choice is motivated by personal preference and peer pressure, DeMello argues the tattoos emergence as a powerful symbol of affiliation and identity. Although she sets the stage for another revival period for the tattoo, she has a closer affinity for the more traditional tattooistswho apprenticed with still older artists and treated their own work like folk artthan the contemporary artisans who rely on tattoo supply companies for equipment and who hearken back to non-Western designs for an allegedly primitive look. A respectful look at an aspect of pop culture not normally treated in such unsensational terms. (22 bw photos) -- Copyright 2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.