





COMMITTED TO INK

ON EXHIBIT FEBRUARY 7 - APRIL 6, 2008

Even in the flashy and permissive world of contemporary American culture, tattoos continue to shock. The inference of pain and the legacy of the practice's history in identity politics still trigger judgments that have little to do with aesthetics. Nevertheless, the visual language of tattooing has gradually integrated itself into the American sense of style. The tattoo is finally being evaluated as art.

Inserting pigment under the skin to form designs stretches back to the Bronze Age, with roots in Europe, Egypt, Japan and the islands of the South Pacific. Tattoos are thought to have been fairly common among Roman soldiers, convicts, slaves and gladiators, but became illegal around the fourth century. Emperor Constantine outlawed the process to keep his subjects from disfiguring their faces, which he saw as a reflection of the face of God. It was the first of many taboos to saddle the tradition.

Still, the practice thrived in other parts of the world. When naval trade and exploration began to reintroduce the art form to Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tattoo again suffered scorn and ridicule. The designs on "savages" were believed to be evidence of their "primitive" nature, while tattoos on sailors signaled their lower class. In both cases, the tattoo served as an emblem of outsider status.

Exclusion from one group, however, can suggest inclusion in another. Groups living outside the mainstream of society began to see the tattoo as a mark of exclusivity and rebellion. The indelible nature of the ink also made it a symbol of

commitment. Thus, different tattooing styles developed among disparate communities.

When sailors returned home from World War II with images on their forearms, biceps, and chests, a grateful nation was unwilling to hold its heroes up to contempt. It was a tipping point in America's assessment of tattoos. Subsequent adoption of the tattoo by rock 'n roll, punk, and other youth-driven movements further solidified the medium. Today's youngest generation no longer finds anything unsavory about adorning their skin with the works of tattoo artists that they admire. The process has even made it onto national television, with shows such as *Miami Ink* and *LA Ink* redefining the public image of the tattoo.

In working on this project with photographer, Amanda Grandfield, I have been lucky to interview a wide range of people about their tattoos. Their passions and personal histories are deeply embedded in these images and the mastery of the medium evident in the best tattoos is astonishing. I found tattooed women's sense of empowerment from redefining traditional beauty particularly moving.

Sullivan Goss is proud to offer an exhibition of photographs, paintings, and live tattooed models in which the tattoo is examined as a fine art medium for the twenty-first century. Certainly, the extraordinary skill exhibited in these figurative paintings argues forcefully for the importance of the cultural phenomenon. When the shock subsides, the beauty comes forward.

- Jeremy Tessmer, Gallery Director



KRISTI ROPELESKI

Blood Harmony 4.1, 2007

48 x 72 inches | oil on canvas



AMANDA GRANDFIELD

Eric's Arm and Torso by Shannon O'Sullivan, 2007

13 x 19 inches | pigment print



SHAWN BARBER

Portrait of the Artist, Phil Holt, c. 2007

60 x 42 inches | oil on canvas



AMANDA GRANDFIELD

Lotus on Felicia by Nate Kostechko, 2007

19 x 13 inches | pigment print



JACK SMITH

Ali and Zoe, Zoe Asleep, 2007-2008

28 x 42 inches | black oil on copper over wood



AMANDA GRANDFIELD

Danny's Arm and Torso by Shannon O'Sullivan, 2007

13 x 19 inches | pigment print



ALIA E. EL-BERMANI

Colin, 2007

38 x 25 inches | charcoal and sanguine on vellum



ABOVE:
STEVEN ASSAEL
Feet, 2001
16 x 12 inches | oil on canvas

RIGHT:
AMANDA GRANDFIELD
Linda's Bee by Unknown Artist, 2007
13 x 19 inches | pigment print



FIRST THURSDAY SNEAK PEEK
MEET THE MODELS & SEE THEIR TATTOOS

Thursday, February 7 | From 5-8PM

OPENING RECEPTION
MEET THE MODELS & THE ARTISTS

Saturday, February 9 | From 5-7PM

PREVIEW THE EXHIBITION ONLINE
http://www.sullivangoss.com/exhibits/tit_for_tat.asp



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COVER:

JANICE URNSTEIN WEISSMAN

Tattoo VIII, 2002

66 x 46 inches | oil on canvas



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