

Tattoo art more than skin deep

LYN DICIERO

For men who flaunted them, it was who had the biggest and best; for women they were more delicate and for the private viewing of partners only," says Janis Nedela, co-director of North Fremantle's Gallery East.

He is speaking of tattooing in Japan between the 17th and 19th centuries when the practice flourished.

"Using the human skin as a canvas, traditional Japanese tattoos have become world famous and remain unequalled in technique, form and variety of representations," he says.

Inked! Body adornment in Japanese & Western Art, at Gallery East, explores this tradition through stunningly detailed early woodblock prints, contemporary woodblock prints by Scottish-born Paul Binnie, and tattoo-inspired sculpture by Perth-based artist Amanda Shelsher.

The rise of wealthy townspeople in Edo, Osaka and Kyoto from the 17th to the 19th centuries nurtured the idea of voluntary tattooing until it was officially banned from 1811 to 1945.

"They were inspired by the coloured woodblock prints and illustrated books of Ukiyo, depicting a hedonistic lifestyle as well as depictions of legendary heroes, urban gangs of discontented and masterless samurai, bands of young townsmen (otokodate) who chose to protect defenceless commoners, and of the Kabuki actors in the roles of these characters on stage," says Nedela.

Nedela says he and Gallery East co-director David Forrest spent the past two years finding suitable traditional woodblock prints depicting tattooing for the exhibition. Each work carries government seals and a printer's seal as well as the mark of the artist.



BUSTED Sculptor Amanda Shelsher with one of her "tattooed" exhibits at the Gallery East exhibition. PICTURE ROBERT DUNCAN

"Before any of these were printed they all had to be approved by the censor and authorised by the government, and then, only if they were popular, would they continue to be printed. The idea of a limited-edition print was a purely European invention.

"The precision and clarity of the prints is superb. The warriors and actors depicted in the prints were like the Vogue magazine of their day, setting fashion trends."

Wimbledon-based artist Paul Binnie collected woodblock prints before becoming entranced by the way they were produced. He lived in Japan for six years studying woodblock printing methods and is considered one of the most important representatives of the New Hanga movement, a blend of the Manga comic style and traditional Japanese printing.

Using models, Binnie adds tattoos inspired by traditional prints to his delicate figures.

Amanda Shelsher approaches the theme of being "inked" differently. Her androgynous busts, representations of herself in porcelain and stoneware, are "tattooed" by incising and colouring before firing.

"People are telling a story on their skin with tattoos," she says. "I have so many ideas; working in this method I can add more layers of storytelling."

Stories of utopian domestic life fill Shelsher's work. Her house in the city is depicted on the works, surrounded by native emblems in a conscious placement, all but willing the urban environment to morph into tranquil bush.

It's a life change in progress after 10 years of searching for the ideal place to call home. She said the exhibition encouraged her to explore Japanese-style tattoos, and admitted to being astounded by her research.

"It certainly pushed me to weave more into the surface of the work," she says.

Shelsher's sculpture has been included in prestigious competitions and exhibitions nationally, and from Chicago to Los Angeles, London to Hong Kong, and Taipei to Korea. **Ⓜ**

Inked! Body adornment in Japanese & Western Art opens on Sunday at Gallery East and continues until February 6.

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SOCCER POOLS

RESULTS
Draw 1328

Saturday, 8 January, 2011.

WINNING NUMBERS

1 14 16 28

29 37 SUPP NO. 31

TOTAL PRIZE POOL
\$87,815.28

DIVISION 1 4 WINNING NUMBERS

PRIZE POOL \$57,070.63
AS THERE WERE NO DIV ONE WINNERS, THE
DIV ONE PRIZE POOL FOR DRAW 1329 WILL
JACKPOT TO AN ESTIMATE OF \$130,000.00.

DIVISION 2 5 WINNING NUMBERS PLUS THE SUPP NUMBER