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# *i n t r o d*

In my experience, hand poked and machine tattoos are two completely different art forms. The outcome for both may be a tattoo, but the process to get there and the feelings associated, have been so different for me. I have always wanted tattoos and have loved it as an art form for many years. Seeing the intersection of beauty, creation,

and significance that tattooing has, has been so wonderful. I've only received a few stick and pokes, from Yazmeen (@yatt00z) and Nic (@nicnpokes), and those experiences were so starkly different from any machine or rotary tattoo I've gotten in the past. It was intimate, it was slow, and I felt connected to my body. It was friends hanging out and tenderness. It was something repetitive and meaningful.

This is not to discount other forms of tattooing at all. Just to realize how different they are and the meanings behind them. I was thinking about it and it all reminds me of something I told a friend. Machine versus hand poke is like oil vs watercolor painting. They're both paintings, but they have completely

# u c t i o n

different mediums, and it feels unjust to compare the two. They may both produce paintings, and they're both so beautiful in their own ways, but the process to get to that end result differs so widely, they don't even feel like the same practice. I deeply appreciate being able to receive stick and poke tattoos. It has given me a new perspective and appreciation for the art of tattooing. I also love machine tattoos and will continue to gather more, but there's something about each individual intentional stab creating a part of a bigger picture that holds such a poetic nature to be appreciated. I hope this zine can help open some eyes on the beauty of hand poked tattooing and what it means to many individuals on a personal, creative, cultural, and spiritual level.

Thank  
you  
and  
get  
poked.

- Geneva Lindsley

# The State of Ink

Geneva Lindsley

In the modern culture we live in, when people think of tattoos, a range of imagery may pop into one's mind. Someone might think of a clunky american traditional design, while others may think of a fine line tattoo of an infinity symbol. Others may think of a realistic grayscale portrait of someone's grandmother or a watercolor tattoo depicting a disney character. On the whole, just like any artform, tattoos have a range of imagery, style, and meaning. However, while the styles of tattoos reach a range of audiences, there are still many that place a stigma on skin ink.

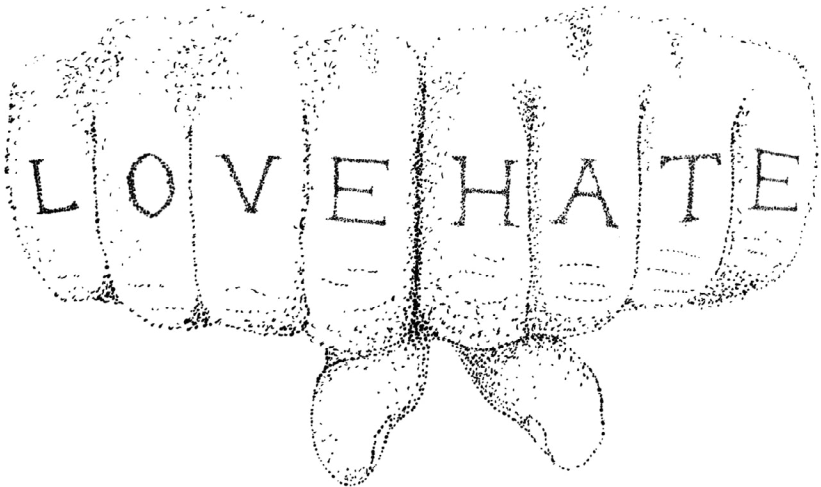
For many years, tattoos have created a barrier in a corporate and employment setting. Inked individuals have been associated with criminal or undesirable behavior, making many a victim of prejudice behavior based on physical appearance (Broussard & Harton, 2018). Though the tight rules on tattoos have loosened throughout the last decade, an article written in 2011 read like a time capsule showing just how recently this prejudice persisted.



The article interviewed a few individuals and their experiences regarding tattoos and employment. A tattoo artist that was included suggested that if a client plans “on being professional in any way,” they may want to “reconsider because... (having a tattoo) [can] definitely... affect [their] ability to get work” (Ermak, 2011). Another interviewee had a knuckle tattoo saying “LOVE” and “HATE” and explained that “It was a big-time regret...” and he “[warns] young people now, don’t get them where people can see them” (Ermak, 2011). Just a few years ago, a tattooed individual and tattoo artist

suggested against this artform and way of expression. And it wasn’t because tattoos are inherently bad, but because there was a fear of unprofessionalism to the point of no employment.

But it hasn’t always been this way. Tattooing has been a part of cultures worldwide for decades. There are the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand, or in their tongue, Aotearoa, with beautifully intricate body and face markings. There are the Inuit women of the North American Arctic with their kakiniit and tunniit which tell meaningful stories of their being. There



are the sak yant tattoos of Thai culture that signify spiritual meanings. And even these only touch the surface of the rich history and significance that tattooing has. The first example of tattoos with a figurative meaning that archaeologists have identified resides on a mummy from 5,200 years ago.

In many of these cases, tattoos are a form of expression on multiple fronts. It can be a spiritual journey to receive and bear the tattoo. It can be culturally significant and act as a deep connection to the roots of the recipient's ancestors. It can act as a symbol of status in the culture it was bred from. And even in a contemporary setting, it can be a personal piece that helps make one feel complete. In any case, it is more than just an illustration—it is a piece of art that helps contribute to the whole of one's self.

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**An  
with**



# Interview

# Yatt00z

Geneva Lindsley



*Yazmeen Norwood (@yatt00z) is originally from Milpitas, California and is currently a fourth year at Cal Poly SLO receiving a major in Psychology with minors in Studio Art, Child Development, and Ethnic Studies. They've loved creating things since they were young and that passion has stayed true to them throughout college. Their main hobbies include tattooing, thrifting, and anything relating to visual and consumable art. They started tattooing other people in September 2021.*

**Geneva: How did you get started with hand poked tattoos?**

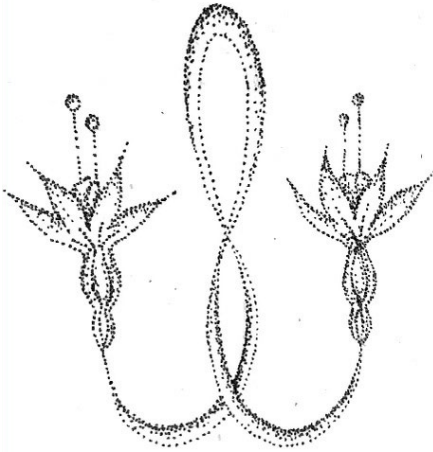
Yazmeen: Probably when I got my first stick and poke tattoo. I was at an art school when I was a junior in high school with a bunch of other high school kids. They were of different majors like painting, illustration, and fashion, and there were three rules: no sex in the dorms, no drugs in the dorms, and no stick and poke tattoos. But they basically gave us all the materials we needed. Like the fashion kids had needles, the industrial design kids had India ink, and we just had everything to do it, so we did it. I got my first one ever there, and I wasn't really thinking much of it. I just thought it was funny, like a fun DIY thing. So then I gave myself like a couple throughout high school. But I wasn't really thinking, "I'm gonna do this in the future," it was more so just like DIY scene, you know, not very sanitary.

**G: Let the kids be kids.**

Y: Yeah, very ignorant tattooing. Because you don't really know much about tattooing as a practice or the history at all. It's kind of like "I want art on my body," so that's kind of how I started. But when

I started recently, it was because I was challenging myself to fill up a sketchbook, which I've never done before. And so I was just drawing a bunch every day, even if it was bad, I was just drawing a lot of shit. And my friends were looking through my sketchbooks, and were like "these would make cool tattoos", like "you should do this on me", whatever, whatever. And I was like, "Okay", and so me and my friend KT were looking at tattoo kits, and they got like a machine and got me a stick and poke kit. So I just practiced on them. And then I practiced on Aliyah, because Aliyah wanted one, and they were super into tattoos. And I never thought I would even get tattoos. But then we were just playing and stuff, and it was really fun.





And then I lost my job at Kin and I was too depressed to find another job. I was looking for other jobs, but I was really down in the dumps. I didn't have the motivation to necessarily start a new job. So I would just take appointments when I had the energy to, and it would pay for my groceries for the week. It was really nice. I wasn't even thinking about money at the time, really. I just wanted to do it. It's still weird to think about money. But that's kind of how it started and then I just kept taking appointments.

**G: That's really cool you were able to sustain yourself with your tattooing. Next question is Why do you do hand poked tattoos?**

Y: Because I feel like I specifically gravitate towards handpoked tattoos because it's very ancestral. It's very close to what my ancestors did, because there wasn't electricity when they were doing that and there's remains of tattoos on mummies and shit. Like, that's so cool.

**G: No yeah, I was looking that up. I think the oldest carbon dated body is around 5,200 years old.**

Y: That's awesome. And the fact that I'm still able to connect to that part of my ancestry, like there's something tangible that I can do is really cool. Also having full control over the needle and not having a machine in between me and what I'm doing helps me learn about the skin in a very intimate way. So when I do want to play with the machine, I already know the layers of the skin really well, and it's slow and intentional. And I like the style of it. I think it works really well with some like the dot work stuff I do. It's just really pretty.

**G: Yeah, absolutely. And this next question you kind of touched on, but if you want to go a little deeper, what about that medium of hand poked is more attractive to you compared to**

**using a machine or not using tattooing  
as a medium in general?**

Y: That's cool. I very much view tattoos as a medium of art and not necessarily a job. When people ask me "Oh, how's your business?" I'm like, "It's not like that at all". If anything, it's just one of the many mediums that I'm into, like, I want to be a painter, that's my dream. But yeah, I think it's helpful for me to practice patience and control. And I don't even necessarily compare it to using a machine. It's just very, very different. I would totally use both if I could, I just haven't practiced much with the machine and it's hard because of school and it's expensive to buy new parts and stuff. But I do really like both. I think if I can use both in the tattoo, that'd be really cool to integrate both forms. But for now, it is a very cool way to start tattooing. I think it's traditional, but not necessarily because you're not going through an apprenticeship, but what's traditional in the sense of history.

**G: I've never thought about that, but that's so true. I was also curious, what were your biggest influences when starting and if they've changed, What are they now?**



Y: Okay. So many. So, there's a few stick and poke artists who I've followed for the longest time. And not even because I wanted to do it too, but because they're sick, including like @cruelbarb on Instagram. There's just a bunch of cool stick and poke artists that I was seeing on social media, even on Tumblr back in the day, which were really inspiring. And then also certain illustrative artists like Kim Jung Gi, he passed away recently, but his work is insane, very detail and action oriented. It doesn't necessarily show itself in my art that much, but it's like what I love to consume. And now, I feel like a lot of my inspirations are people who do really



big machine pieces, like their Instagram is @shyfuck, favorite artist ever. Like so good. They're based in Vancouver. And they play a lot with different textures and get a lot of inspiration from the details of nature and patterns and stuff, which I also really like. And then also @mtfdoom on



Instagram. And I don't know I like shapes. I like appealing shapes. Like as you can tell I do a lot of stars.

**G: They're so good. That's something about stars. They're the perfect shape.**

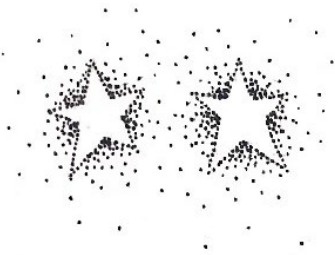
Y: A universal shape, And it's always been used throughout history to like represent something but you can like make it mean whatever.

**G: Yeah, I love how you get inspiration from multiple mediums. And then what valuable experiences have you had tattooing others, or yourself?**

Y: Okay, I'll start with others. I feel like I've met so many cool fucking people tattooing, especially because it's in my house. So I'm kind of watchful of who books appointments, but everyone's cool as fuck though. I feel like it helps me interact with people and socialize, especially since COVID, I've just been very closed off in that way, so that's been really awesome. And then having mutuals and online friend artists from other places is really cool. I'm now able to guest in other cities and work at their studios if I want to, and that's such a blessing. Just like all the amazing connections, I've made close friends. I really value any human connection. And for myself, I've only given myself a couple tattoos since I've started tattooing other people consistently. But it just helped me feel back inside my body to be honest, you know? I'll feel kind of depersonalized and then it's like, "oh, there we go. I'm back." You know? It just makes me appreciate parts of my body, parts I didn't like before. It's really nice.

**G: Yeah, that's a great answer. Where were the different places that you've guest spotted?**

Y: It wasn't really a guest spot, but my mentor let me work at her art studio. She just showed me how to use a machine and like let me take some appointments while I was in the bay. She helped me get my licenses and I was able to work at the Academy of Sciences pop up event which was so fun. And then I worked in San Diego at Pixley's Oddities, which is like a cute little queer quirky ass shop, which was really fun. And then I worked at Dark Dimension Oakland, which is a private studio in downtown Oakland. Very chill, very amazing owners. And then I guested at Dollhouse in Berkeley. Dollhouse has a similar vibe to Pixley's, like super over the top quirky, queer and accepting and warm. Everyone was so nice everywhere I guested too. It's really wonderful. And I learn a lot from each place I go to, like I learned how to use a stencil printer and stuff.



**G: That's so cool. It's a really cool inspiration to see you getting to guests at these different places. And it's like how Nic worded it, like "they're also just a student at Cal Poly that's super stoked on this," you know? It shows what you can do with dedication and passion.**

Y: Dude, for real. I feel like I just look for things to be alive for, but not in a morbid way. This is something that makes me feel very in my human body and I like feeling excited. I like feeling nervous before tattooing, it makes me feel human. That's really nice to come from Nic, that's really sweet. And from you, especially you.

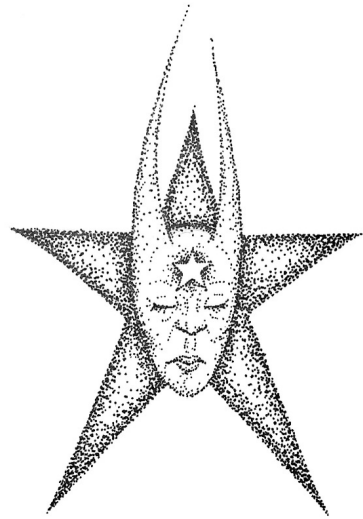
**G: Stop it, you're too sweet! Moving on a little, as a tattoo artist, do you find that there are different experiences in the self expression of tattooing someone versus getting tattooed?**

Y: Oh my god, yeah, I literally am putting my shit on other people's bodies. It's the coolest way to express myself ever because it's living on people. So I think there's less pressure when it's on myself, funnily enough, because when I get tattoos as self expression, I don't really get my own ideas. It helps me

practice non-attachment to my body and appreciate what I like at that moment. So it's a very different way of self expression. I feel like I personally get to express my own art and creativity through tattooing and other people. And I get to practice creative expression of non attachment and like radical acceptance through getting tattooed, I would say.

**G: Yeah, I like that. What personal and or cultural significance does hand poked tattooing have for you?**

Y: Well, personal significance, it's just a very intimate way of creating art with someone. And everyone has helped me grow as an artist a lot too. And then cultural significance, my mom's Lebanese, but I don't know much about tattooing in the Middle East. My heritage on my dad's side is everywhere. I'm a little indigenous from you know, slavery, but I know in Africa, like the tribes, there were practices there. I feel very disconnected because I'm not able to trace it back necessarily. But then also meeting other black tattoo artists who feel the same way and getting tattooed by other black artists is really special.



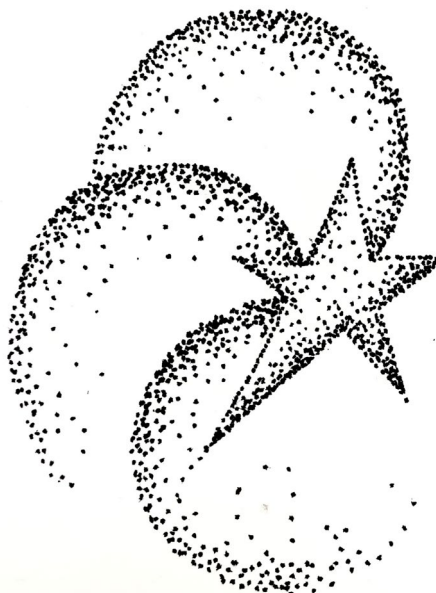
**G: So do you think, kinda what you're talking about earlier, you feel close to your ancestors when you handpoked? Like do you feel that connection with those roots that you don't really know where they go back to?**

Y: Yeah, because I'm like, "how am I able to just do this?" Like this has gotta be in my blood somehow, like it's a very ceremonial thing. You have to set an intention and you have to be very present with it. And you have to set up and tear down and walk people through the steps. Just the idea that that was done, but maybe in a religious or spiritual way, is really cool or like, like rites of passage. I mean, like immediate culture, no one in my family has tattoos. They don't like tattoos. They're

very traditional in that way. So it's nice to extend past that and just be like, "Well, what were my ancestors actually doing?" like, I'm sure they weren't in a church on Sunday ridiculing gay people. You know what I mean? They were probably just sitting in a field praying to each other. Yeah, just like what I like to imagine.

**G: Yeah, it's an interesting contrast of like "oh, this is how it should be because this is what the people before us did", where you're like "no this is what the people before them, did." Moving on, as a tattooer yourself, do you notice the stigma that has historically surrounded your craft?**

Y: Oh, definitely. Especially like touching back on religious family members like my grandma. She knows I tattoo and she was like, "don't get anything on your neck" or "don't get anything on your hands" and they just tell me where not to get tattoos. And then also just being black and people calling stick and pokes prison tattoos. I'm like, "okay. I get it". Like I get it that there are prison tattoos and they do exist, but that's like a microaggression. Like, don't call them that, especially towards a black artist.



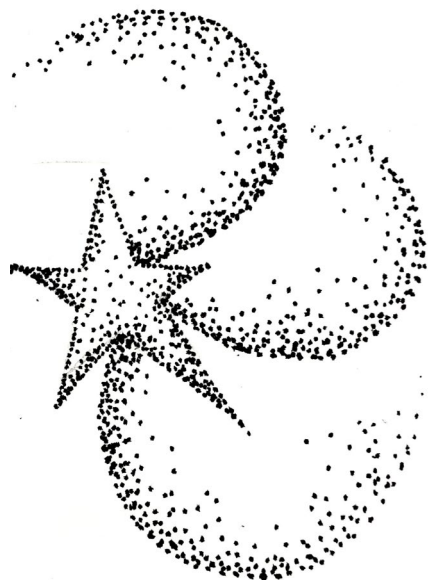
**G: Have people said that in relation to the art that you do?**

Y: Just old people, like old heads, like, "oh, like prison tattoos?" I'm like, "oh, no..."

**G: Actually, not at all.**

Y: I feel like I'm forced to be made aware of the stigma because I'm already at the receiving end of a lot of stupid comments. But it's cool that we live in a place where bosses and CEOs and corporate people are getting inked up.

**G: It's finally starting to dissipate.**



Y: Yeah.

**G: Why do you think there is a stigma and has been a stigma around tattoos? Like especially thinking of the context of how old this practice is.**

Y: Racism, xenophobia, literally every -ism ever. I feel like white people, specifically colonizers, stigmatize anything that isn't theirs and then try to steal it and make it their own. Like American traditional is stolen Japanese art made by white people. I still respect it, you know what I

mean? Like, much respect to American traditional for bringing tattooing to the United States and just being such a cool avenue for artists to have a common new medium. But it's also probably why the stigma exists, as well.

**G: I think that's a great point. When you look at the history of where all of these practices have been born, it's mostly within indigenous or non-white cultures. I feel like the majority of significant tattoo examples were not from European countries, but more so where people of color are from.**

Y: I think it's just a lot of ignorance and fear of the unknown. Throughout history, white people have viewed certain things as something to be afraid of or to demonize. But, if you really take a step back and look at it, it's actually beautiful. But you just don't accept it, because you're afraid. But also, there are tattoos that have been associated with scary ass things too, like pirates.

**G: Yeah, I feel like they're also strongly associated with people who have been incarcerated.**

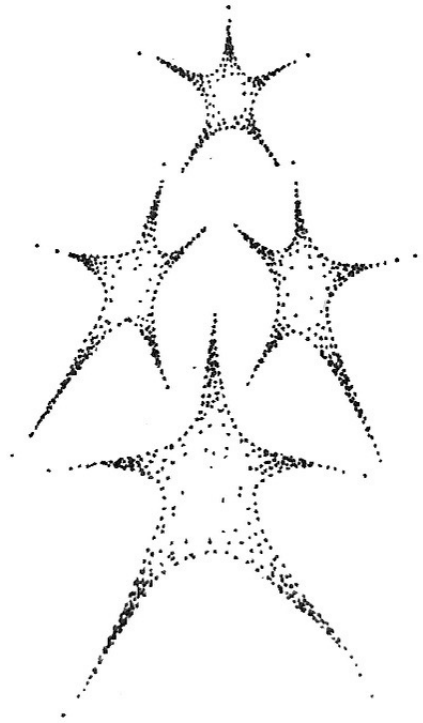
Y: Yeah, and gangs and stuff like that. There are definitely universal gang tattoos, so that stigma exists for that reason. It makes sense, but it's still sad.

**G: It has kind of tainted this art practice for everyone. Alright, we're almost done. I promise.**

Y: No time is gone.

**G: Where do you see tattooing in the future? And how do you think handpoked tattoos will exist in that realm?**

Y: I feel like the thing about the internet and tattoos now is that there're tattoo trends, which is interesting. Like the trend cycles of tattoos. Like, that era of Pinterest tattoos that everyone had, and now it's like a millennial thing. So I think that that will definitely still happen, but maybe it's because the trend cycles are going so fast that all of them will bleed into each other. I think there'll be a lot more handpoke artists, as the other face of tattooing, maybe in certain realms, but especially on the internet. I'm excited to see where hand poked goes, especially because I feel like I'm too new to have a concrete answer like, "Oh, I think this is



gonna happen." I really know just as much as anyone. I don't know, that's a good question. I'm excited. What do you think?

**G: Well, my boyfriend Tom told me about an interview with Good Time Charlie and he was like, "I think in 20 years, all tattoos are gonna be painless and they'll put it on in an instant with a laser" or something like that. And I feel like with hand poked tattoos, because like you were saying it's an ancient practice, with such a fast world that keeps accelerating with being efficient and all this stuff, it's really interesting to think of how this really old practice will keep on going with this accelerated technology world. I hope it still flourishes because it is so intentional and beautiful. And it's like, I don't know, it's so human and it's so right. I feel like society is always trying to make everything faster or more efficient, but we don't need to do that. It's been working!**

Y: I feel like that will definitely happen. I was talking to Estelle, someone who gave me a tattoo, and they were like "If you could get a tattoo that was like a stamp and you're done, and maybe it hurts for one second, would you get it?" And we were all just like "honestly, probably yeah." Like that sounds cool. But I don't know, it's so permanent and I feel like the quickness might make it feel more temporary? Not being able to watch it go into your skin.

**G: I feel like it's a rite of passage to sit through the chair—whether you use numbing cream or not—but just like physically putting your body through that. Because yeah, that's on your body forever, unless you want to get that shit lasered off. Okay one last question. How do you plan to proceed with hand poked tattooing as a craft? And where do you see yourself evolving?**

Y: Oh, I'm just gonna keep doing it. I'm gonna graduate and I'm gonna keep doing it and I'm gonna get better and I just want to practice and practice. Because even though I've only been doing it for a little over a year, there's so many areas I need to improve in, for sure. And I just wanna do that and I feel like it'll stay with me as long

as it needs to, maybe forever? Because I definitely want to focus on other mediums, especially after I graduate, when I have the time to. Because like being a psych major, there's not like a ton of time. So I'm glad I'm able to do some stuff with my studio art minor and have more time to work on my paintings and drawings and things. But I definitely think I'll keep doing it for a while, I love it and I hope to travel with it, that would be really cool. And, I wanna draw more because my drawings are the root of my best work, so I definitely need to focus on that. Maybe I'll have a little set up in a future apartment or I'll be a resident somewhere at a tattoo studio and will be doing other kinds of tattoos, machine, hybrid, whatever. Like who knows? I have no idea where I'll be, but I'm very eager for whatever it is. I definitely don't see this as being the end of an era anytime soon.

**G: Yeah, absolutely. I feel like you're in a really great spot right now and people are so stoked to see where you'll go. I feel like you have a big support group of people that just want to see you do good.**

Y: I also feel like I have that and, not that I don't feel like I deserve it, but I'm like "where did this come from?" I feel so loved by people I don't necessarily know.

**G: I think you're just a really cool person. You're really nice. You have a nice effect on people.**

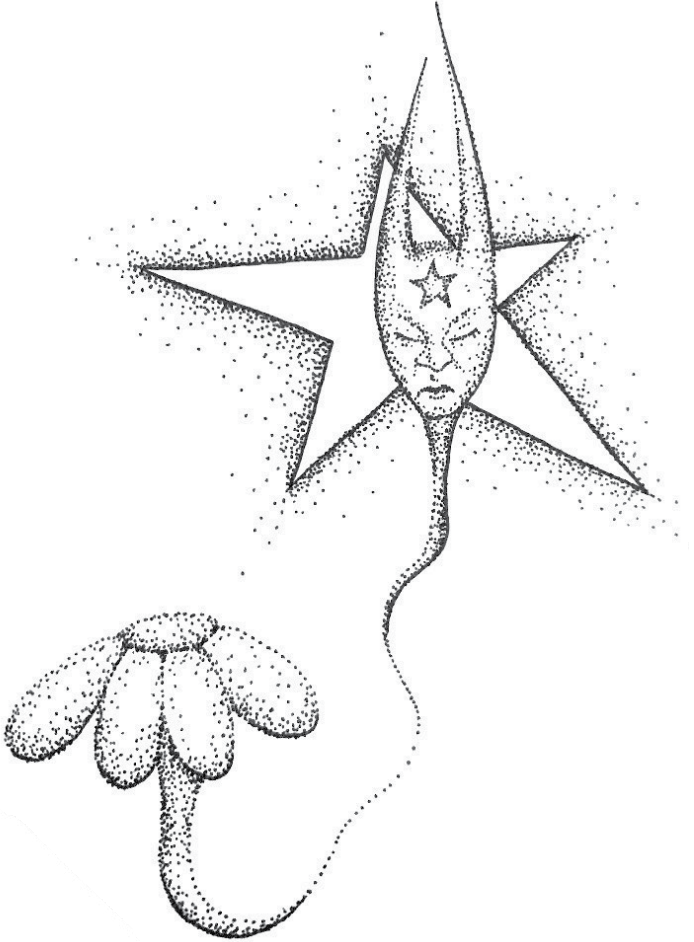
Y: No, stop! That's nice, that's really sweet. That makes me happy. Like shit like that, that's why I'm alive. Shit like that, it's so special.



edited for clarity

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# Ancient Art

## *Irezumi and Tabori: Traditional Japanese Hand Poked Tattoos*

Tom McDonald

Known as irezumi, Japanese tattoos are a hand-poked tradition dating back thousands of years. In earliest recorded history, permanent markings were regarded by indigenous groups as symbols of spiritual significance and social status. However, as Japanese society developed, tattoos began to be used as a form of criminal penalty. During the Edo period (1603-1867) tattoos were formally used to identify criminals. Known as irezumi kei, and translated as “tattoo punishment”, criminals received

permanent markings to catalog and notify others of their crime. This practice created a negative stigma toward any form of tattoo, and ultimately led to tattoos being declared illegal at the start of the Meiji period (1868-1912). Despite the negative sentiment toward tattoos, irezumi actually flourished during the Edo and Meiji periods. Decorative tattoos gained underground popularity and made great advancements as a technical art form.

The foundation of contemporary irezumi was set in the images of a 1757 novel, *Water Margin*. This was a popular Chinese classic, and was an instant success upon its translation and release in Japan. The story is one of rebellious courage, and features woodblock printed images by Utagawa Kuniyoshi. These images

were incredibly powerful and pictured characters in heroic acts. Most notably, these characters were heavily tattooed. The popularity of the novel quickly changed the opinions of rebellious individuals, as many sought to be tattooed in the same style as the heroes in *Water Margin*.



Japanese people began to seek out traditional tattooers and woodblock printers to receive tattoos; however, this was no easy process. Because of the illegal and stigmatized nature of irezumi after the start of the Meiji period, tattooers were forced to operate underground. They worked discreetly by word of mouth and often had no formal training. These pioneers of irezumi created a unique style of hand poked tattooing which allowed them to create large scale, "body suit",

tattoos reflecting and depicting scenes of *Water Margin*. This form of hand poked irezumi is referred to as tebori, which translates to "carved by hand".

Tebori tattoos were applied with sets of needles attached to long bamboo handles called nomi. The tattooer would stretch the skin of the recipient and push the nomi with a specified pressure so the needle would settle the ink to the skin. This was a painful, strenuous process for





both tattooer and recipient, and required a great deal of commitment from both parties. Because of their great size and intricacy, tebori body suits would often take months or years to complete.

The sentiments of commitment and illegality were particularly attractive to the Japanese organized crime syndicate: the Yakuza. Because the Yakuza already had strong connections within the Japanese underground, and may have already been tattooed as a form of criminal punishment, they were some of the first Japanese people to be heavily tattooed during

the Edo and Meiji periods. However, criminals were not the only people to be tattooed. Many working class people who connected with the rugged spirit of *Water Margin* also began to get tattooed during this time. Even wealthy merchants and businessmen would be secretly tattooed. They viewed it as a means of privately displaying their wealth and power.

After the second World War, occupying forces legalized tattooing. However, this did not immediately change the broad stigma that Japanese culture had towards tattooing. The majority of Japanese

citizens still associated irezumi with punished or organized criminals. This led to many public spaces and businesses to restrict entry for those with visible tattoos. Japanese attitudes towards tattoos have relaxed since the latter half of the 20th century, as tattoos have grown increasingly popular worldwide. But as the stigma towards tattooing has changed in Japan, so has the technology. Most tattoos in Japan are no longer hand poked with tebori, and are instead drawn on with an electric machine. This shift in stigma and technology has put traditional irezumi in an interesting position. Technologically, tebori irezumi has been left behind. Its process is considered inefficient compared to modern tattoo machines, and is only practiced by specialists within the tattoo community. Inversely, tebori irezumi has seen a great resurgence in cultural significance. It has been recognized as a unique form of heritage art in Japan, with Japanese and international people alike connecting with its captivating imagery, history, and application.

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# An with

a clever pun for stick'n'pokes

genius.

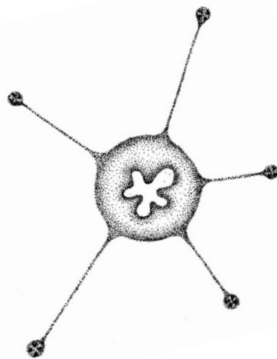




# Interview

# Nic'n'

# Pokes



Geneva Lindsley

*Nicole, who also goes by Nic (@nicnpokes), is currently a Psychology major at Cal Poly with a Studio Art as well as a Queer Studies minor. They've been creating art since they were young and always wanted to be a tattoo artist. They felt that pursuing art as a career was unattainable, but after encouragement from their partner, brother, and friends, decided to give it a shot. They've been acquiring supplies and knowledge surrounding tattooing for 4 years and have started tattooing others for about 6 months.*

**Geneva:** How did you get started in the hand poked tattoo realm?

Nic: Well, I've been obsessed with tattoos since I found out what they were. I did a hand poke on my friend with a sewing

needle and a pen, like on more than one occasion, 'cause I was like, "let's do it guys!" Of course they were really terrible, but that's to be expected. Nobody got infected, and that was great.

**G: Hey, that's a win.**

N: Yeah. And I was working at Tiger Rose Tattoo Shop for a little bit. I didn't tell anyone there that I was interested in tattooing, but I just observed and learned a lot about the cleaning aspect and that kind of thing. And truthfully, machines are just expensive, and so over the past three to five years or so, I've just been collecting needles, ink, cleaning supplies, and all the things that you need to do tattoos. I finally had enough to really tattoo myself and others. When I decided to commit to start practicing more, I had practice skin and stuff, and I was like "I am just gonna say fuck it and spend all my savings on a tattoo machine and do that." But I really, unexpectedly, fell in love with hand poke, and now I don't even care if I get a machine. It would be cool, and I probably will in the future, but I think there's something really really cool about starting with hand poked because... its like doing the steps, its like walking before you run, or crawling before you walk.



**G: Like a slower version of it to get comfortable with it?**

N: Yeah, and I feel like people just who start with a tattoo machine don't fully understand what that machine is doing, versus when you've poked every single poke in that... you're like "Wow, this is a craft and I appreciate it so much!" I don't know, I think it's really special.

**G: Yeah, that's beautiful. You kinda touched on this, but I would love to hear just slightly more in depth, but what**



**about that medium is so attractive to you, compared to using a machine or just doing art that isn't tattooing?**

N: There's so many things about tattoos and tattooing that are just amazing and beautiful and special. I think there's something about putting your art on someone's body and them walking around and how happy that makes them. I just always thought tattoos were the coolest thing, but there's also a whole other component of it for me. I originally started studying psychology because I wanted to do something in the realm of

helping people with body dysmorphia, eating disorders, gender dysphoria, and all of that overlap, and I found that the number one thing that has helped me with that stuff is getting tattoos. That was just the coolest thing ever to me. I have my back and stomach all tattooed, and my stomach was one of the first tattoos I got, even though it was huge, and people were like "you're crazy".

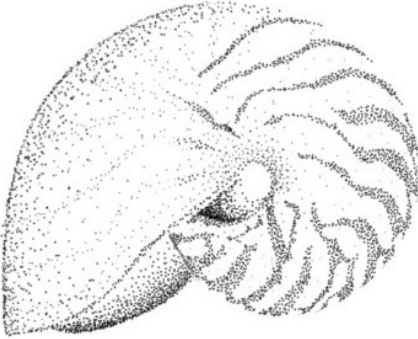
**G: It's a bold move.**

N: It is a bold move, but it really changed the way I see myself and the way I look at myself in the mirror and it's honestly so much more helpful than any other therapy or medication.

**G: That's so beautiful.**

N: Yeah, so there's a medicinal aspect to it. Then recently, I've been wanting to research more about acupuncture and tattoos, because tattooing is like this whole beautiful thing that people are only seeing the surface of and I feel like there's so much more there.

**G: Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm curious, what were your biggest influences on getting started, and what are they now?**



N: I feel like, truthfully, watching Yazmeen's instagram grow was very inspirational to me because I was like, "there's a real person in San Luis Obispo that goes to Cal Poly and they're just doing it. I have all the stuff and I've been drawing designs for months and the only difference is that I just haven't done it." I love Yazmeen, they're super supportive and helpful and helping me figure my shit out too, which is so cool. And then, Instagram is like the hub for tattoo artists, especially hand poked home tattoo artists, and there's so many people that I follow that I love to look at, and I love to see what they're doing.

**G: That must be so cool to have that connection. Moving on, what valuable experiences have you had tattooing others or tattooing yourself?**

N: Ooh, um one comes to mind that's kind of dark, but it's also kind of beautiful. I think there is something really special and it's something that I've noticed with myself and a lot of other people. When you're getting a tattoo, there's almost this stillness that you feel because you have to physically be still. It's very grounding because you're feeling something and a lot of us are dissociated and not grounded. So, it's to sit with someone while they're being more grounded than they probably have been in weeks, months, or years. And I feel like that has sparked some really interesting conversations and a bond, which is so cool, because I always wanted to work with and talk to people.

**G: That's perfect. And then as a tattoo artist yourself, do you find different experiences in the self expression of tattooing versus getting tattooed?**

N: Yes, super different. I feel like getting tattooed is like such a personal experience. And I think that when you're tattooing someone, you're providing that for them, as opposed to being the one that's experiencing that. But getting tattooed is so cool and I've met a couple of really, really cool, queer artists in LA

that I've just spent hours with. One time, at the end of the session, I was like, dying. I was literally crying because of the weakness from being tattooed all day. I was emotionally raw and I was like, "I guess we're best friends now?". But yeah, I think it's more personal for the person who's getting the tattoo, because they're more exposed and vulnerable, as opposed to the tattooer who's there to create that safe space. But I want nothing more than to create that space for other people and have it be comfortable and welcoming and not hostile.

**G: Yeah, I totally get that. Along with the value it has to you, what personal significance does hand poked tattooing have for you?**

N: When I think of personal significance, it makes me think of when I was 13 in my friend's bedroom, and it's 1am, and we're stabbing each other with sewing needles. No matter how shitty that little whatever we put on that person looks now, it's a timestamp. It's a stop in time and now a beautiful memory that we laugh about 10 years later. I think even if I were to get into machine tattooing, handpoked will always hold a very special place in my heart.

**G: Yeah, that's beautiful. And as a tattooer yourself, do you notice the stigma that has historically surrounded your craft?**

N: Yeah. For me personally, my parents still don't know that I've tattooed people and I've had trouble introducing it to family members. Parents and extended family just kind of have mean and rude comments. It's weird especially when the person who's making the comment is an artist themselves. Like, this is art! This is its own craft. And I think a lot of people still only want to get tattoos where they can hide them, and I also experience that. It's just ingrained in all of our brains now, like I still don't want to put too many tattoos on my fingers or anything like that. But I think I told, like, one aunt of mine that I was interested



in tattooing months ago. To this day, my parents are blocked on my Instagram because they just kinda think of it as a joke, they don't take it seriously. I've tried to explain the significance and the positive impact on mental health, which is kind of what my senior project is about, but they don't care. They don't give a shit.

**G: I'm so sorry.**

N: Yeah, they'll get with it at some point.

**G: It's definitely hard to have conversations with parents that are traditional and aren't really a part of that culture. I know there's some people that are like, "oh yeah, my parents have a bunch of tattoos, so it's not a big deal," but I also did not have that experience. It's a conversation of "we love you, but we won't encourage it" or "are you sure you wanted that?" And you're like, "I got it. I paid the money. I planned it out."**

N: They still think that you're going to regret it in the future.

**G: Yeah, no matter how long you've liked it or how much you've wanted it.**

N: That was one of the things that kept me from getting big tattoos for a long time. I was like, "Oh, what if I regret it?" But now I'm like, "fuck it put anything on me." I literally don't care. Let's do some fun shit or whatever.

**G: I'm glad you've been able to break out of that mindset. And then I have two more questions. Where do you see tattooing going in the future? And how do you think hand poked tattoos will exist in that realm? And the second one is how do you plan to proceed with hand poked tattooing as a craft? And where do you see yourself evolving?**

N: It's kind of one in the same. I have no idea where I see hand poke overall as a practice, but I know where I want to take it. Basically, I want to go get my Master's in art therapy and be able to practice therapeutic tattoos. I don't think it's a brand new thing, I'm sure there are people who are probably practicing that, but I haven't been able to find any. I know there's trauma informed tattooing and people who are more conscious of the potentially therapeutic benefits of tattoo. But, I really want to try and create some kind of practice where you can

come to somebody and tailor your tattoo experience to what you really need in life. To have someone who's trained in both art and in therapy and is able to help you figure out what you need, is my ultimate goal.

Sabrina Drescher (@sabotage.tattoos), who I forgot to mention is one of my biggest influences, did their senior thesis surrounding hand poked tattooing specific to reclaiming parts of the body that individuals feel have been stolen from them. From what I remember, it was basically targeting a part of the body that they felt like they no longer had ownership over and then making it something totally new and beautiful. Clients with a bad memory of being violated attached to certain parts of their body with no consent, were able to replace it with an experience where everything is fully consented to. So every step of the way you ask "is it okay if I wash this part of your body off now? Is it okay if I shave this? Is it okay with you if I start poking now? How are you feeling?" And they have this brand new experience now associated with that part of your body instead of this old traumatic memory. And there's something too about the poking process that's like

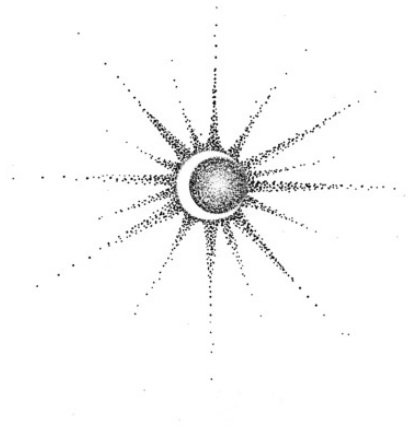
releasing the trauma and the pain from that part of the body and reclaiming it as your own again. And that to me was like, so cool.

**G: That's super beautiful. That's really, really nice. I can't wait to see what is in store for you in the future and thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me.**

edited for clarity

all illustrations are Nicole's with their permission

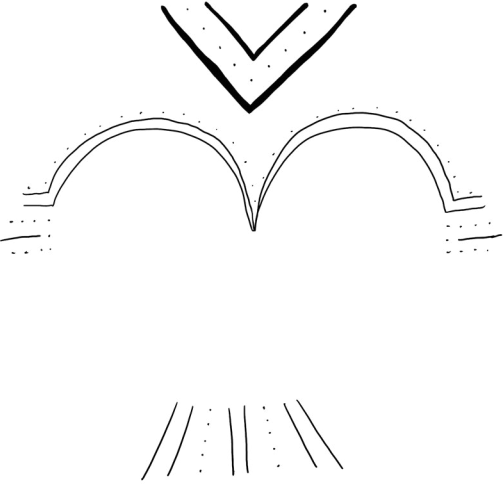
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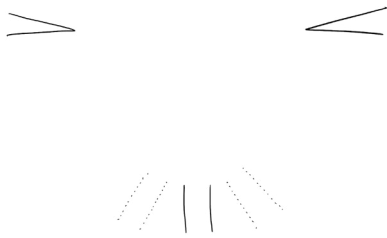
# Beyond Desire

*The Beauty of  
Inuit Tattooing*

Geneva Lindsley



The desire to be marked has been relevant for millennia. I believe that we have a tendency to want to have a mark on the world around us forever, and it translates to us wanting to mark ourselves. The art of tattooing is something that has stayed alive through generations of cultures for



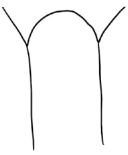
many years. In some cultures, it has lived through colonization, missionaries, bans, and genocides. The significance of these markings goes beyond desire; they run deep in the livelihoods and importance in these people's lives.

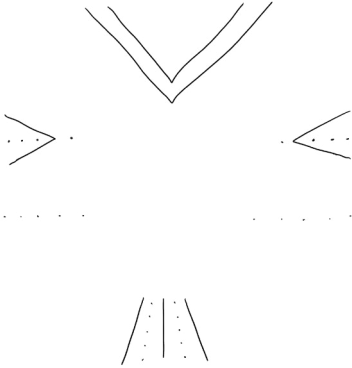


The practice of Inuit tattooing has lived in "Alaska for millennia by Iñupiat and Yup'ik women" (Identifying Marks, n.d.). In Inuit culture, face tattoos have significant cultural and spiritual importance. Their markings are deeply rooted in traditions and customs and are believed to represent various aspects of their identity, culture, and personal history. In their practice, receiving kakiniit, which are the traditional tattoos of the Inuit of the North American Arctic reserved mainly for women, acted as a ceremonial rite of passage. The lines and markings can represent events such as their first period, entering womanhood, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, and more. The tattoos were also thought to have spiritual significance, symbolizing the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. They aren't just tattoos, they represent the lives lived in that person's being.

Different kinds of face markings are specific to areas of the face such as "tavluḡun (chin tattoo); iri (tattoos in the corner of the eyes); siqñiq (forehead tattoo, also meaning "sun,"); and sassuma

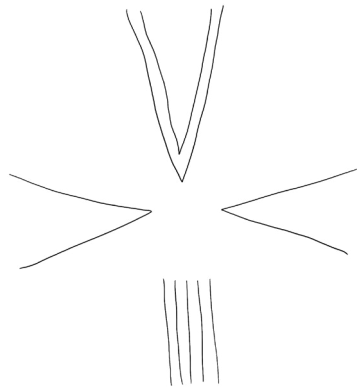
aana (tattoos on the fingers representing the sea mother)" (Identifying Marks, n.d.). As there are specific types of tattoos, there are also different methods by which someone can get marked. The two most common methods are hand poking and hand stitching. Hand poking, which can be used for any type of tattoo, involves using a needle to poke ink into the skin. This is what many think of when in reference to hand poked tattooing. Hand stitching, on the other hand, is a practice reserved specifically for Inuit tattooing only. This process involves a thread soaked in ink and a needle to then sew a design into the skin of the recipient. This process is painful but is unique to indigenous communities, which gives it even more power and significance.

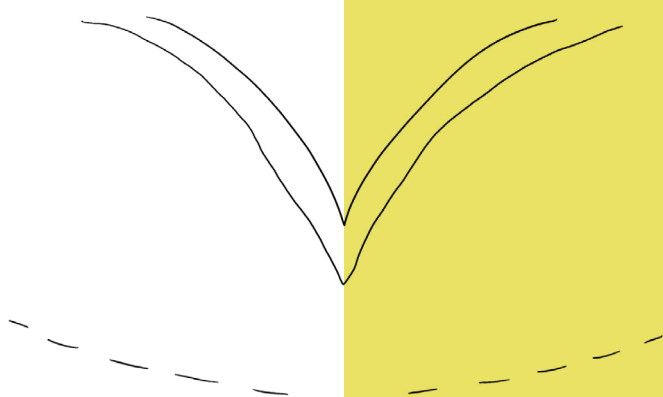




Though these practices and processes carry massive significance in Inuit culture, due to oppression and colonization, the practices have been dormant within many tribes. For many years, women were not allowed to get tattooed as missionaries “proclaimed the tattoos [to be] evil” (Allford, 2019). It wasn’t until more recently that there has been a resurgence of indigenous tattoos. Many women are now getting traditional Inuit tattoos as a way to connect with their ancestors and honor their cultural identity. The Inuit Tattoo Revitalization Project has made a big impact in encouraging more Inuit women to get their cultural markings.

An art that was nearly lost has now been given a breath of new life for the chance of survival. Those finding ways to connect to their deep-rooted history and culture, try to honor what tattooing was, “not in the last 200 years, but in the beginning” (Holly Mititquq Nordlum in Identifying Marks, n.d.). Additionally, there has been a growing interest in Inuit culture and art among non-Indigenous people, which has helped to raise awareness of these traditional tattoos and their significance. Overall, the resurgence of Inuit women’s tattoos is a reflection of the ongoing efforts to preserve and celebrate Indigenous cultures and traditions, and to ensure that these practices continue to be passed down to future generations.



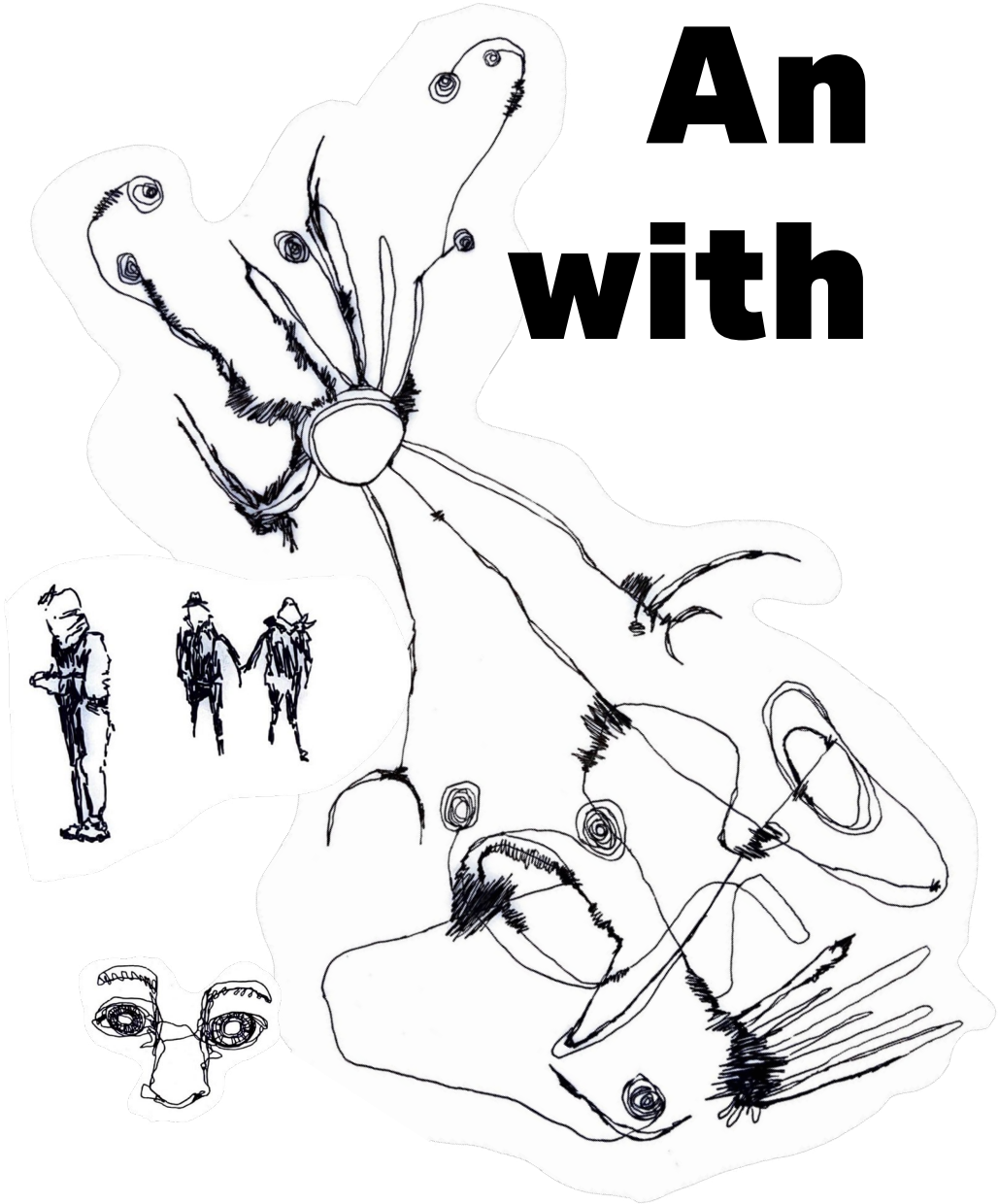


Learning more about these practices and hearing about the deep importance of these markings has been so beautiful. There are many people who, if you were to mention a face tattoo, would mention how they're a "bad" or "dumb" decision. There are many that see face tattoos as a death sentence in capitalism and will stereotype anyone with ink living on someone's face, regardless of cultural practice. But I would hope that if they took a step back and realized what facial marking can mean to individuals and communities, they would reconsider their harsh judgments. For many, tattoos are deeper than their skin surface. And for a growing number, tattoos represent their traditions and culture. They are beyond desire.

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# An with



# Interview

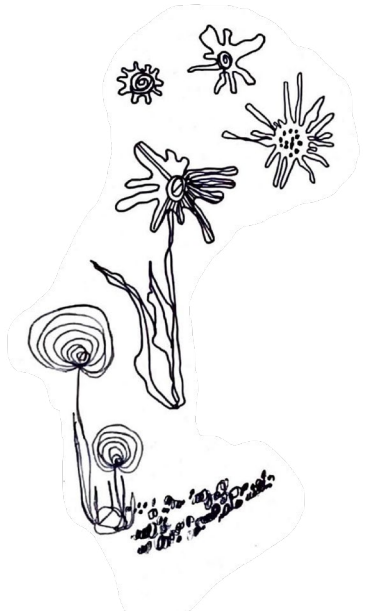
# Pirate

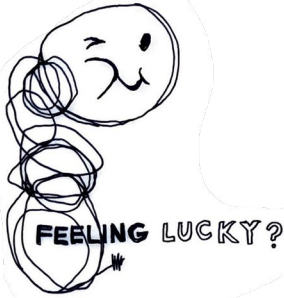
# Pokes

Geneva Lindsley

*Moxie Bright (@piratepokes) is from Berkeley, California and is currently a third year studying Art at the College of Creative Studies in Santa Barbara. She did her first stick-and-poke around 14 years old on her hand and while in highschool, and realized the opportunities hand*

*poked tattoos have. As someone interested in art for many years, college became an intersection of creating more and putting it all into practice. She's now been doing hand poked tattoos on others since the spring of her freshman year in college.*





**G: How and why did you get started with hand poke tattoos? Was there something that pushed you into that?**

M: When I was a lot younger, it was just the convenient thing. And then once I got to school here, and I had been doing handpoke for a little while, I was asked quite a bit if I was gonna get a machine. In the grand scheme of things, that seems to be where people would go after they've done hand poked tattoos. I didn't really want to spend that money initially, that was some of it. Also, starting to think about the research that would go into teaching myself how to use a machine, did not seem realistic at all, especially as a college student. I'm doing school most of the time, I don't have the time, or energy really, to commit a bunch of hours to doing that, when I can keep working on my practice that I'm already doing. So that was a big reason why I've stuck with hand poke. And as I've done it more, I just enjoy it a lot more. I haven't tried a machine, but I don't feel fulfilled by that practice. It feels really personal doing the work, rather than like just picking up a pen and going at it. And then there's something else; it's a process that makes me feel really mindful about what I'm doing and the effect and the impact that it has. There's a

big connection there, and I just really like how it's something that just comes from my arm. It's very grounding. Yeah.

**G: What would you say were your biggest influences when starting? and if they've changed, What are they now?**

M: I think, at least in high school, it was just that I wanted tattoos and I could just do it myself. I was like, "Sure, this is great," then as I got a little more comfortable with it, and was able to tattoo other people. It was something cool that I could do and incorporate my art into. It was only until this past summer, when I was getting tattooed by other artists and getting to talk to people, where I was really focusing on this as a career and something that I can continue to do. I can tattoo my art on people, focus on my own style in that respect, and delve into that specifically. So it kind of fell into place in terms of everything aligning with what I was interested in and what my goals are for my career as an artist. Yeah, just everything kind of came together really nicely.

**G: Yeah, that's so dope. What would you say are some of the most valuable experiences that you've had tattooing others or yourself?**

M: Oh, man. Just building trust and being able to talk to people in that vulnerable space and make them comfortable. There have been a lot of people that come in for their first tattoo, and, I mean, I don't have a very good sense of how that feels anymore because I ripped off that band aid so long ago. But for some people that can be scary, that can be stressful and being able to talk people through that, and also chat with them about how that is an interest of mine and why they're here and why they want to get something, and also be able to share my work in that way is really special. If I'm doing some art and I come up with flash that people want to get like, that's really cool. It feels really humbling to have my artwork somewhere that will be there for somebody's life.

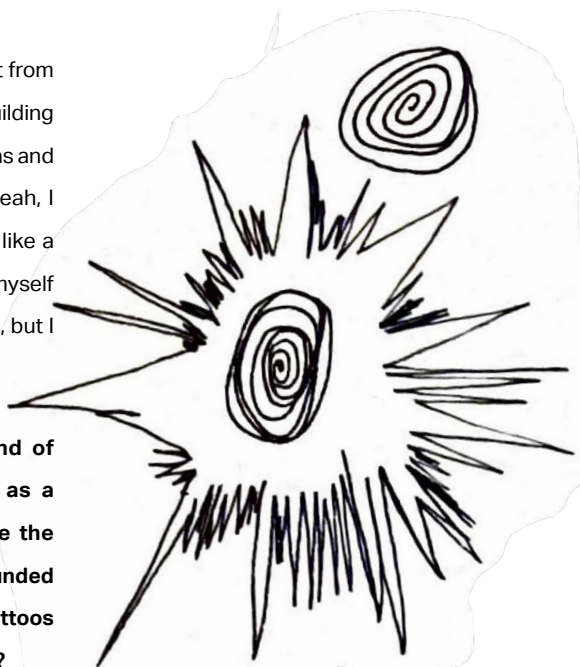
**G: That's really cool. And as a tattoo artist, do you find there's different experiences in the self expression of tattooing someone versus getting tattooed?**

M: Oh yeah. Most of the tattoos that I receive are the tattoos of people doing their artwork and doing their own thing. So in that respect, I'm just giving into that pattern of "I want to tattoo my art

on somebody, and I'm receiving art from somebody else". It's just kind of building that network of an exchange of ideas and themes and people's gifts. And yeah, I guess in that respect, it's kind of like a two way street. I guess tattooing myself is just kind of honoring that as well, but I get to just do it on me instead.

**G: That's really interesting. Kind of switching the topic a bit, but as a tattooer yourself, do you notice the stigma that has historically surrounded your craft, including either just tattoos in general or like stick and pokes?**

M: Yup. I came home with so many tattoos this summer and had to explain them to my grandparents and my mom. And I was like "This is what it is, it's really not a big deal". And my dad was like, "It's on you forever". But yeah, I don't have to confront family members that are really against tattoos, and I feel very grateful to not have to deal with that. But I don't know, just being able to talk about it in terms of the community aspect, and like, the aspect of it being an art form, and being a practice is something that is really cool. I love talking to people about it, specifically handpoke, even in Isla Vista. I've talked to







people before, who are like, "Oh, you do stick-and-poke?" And it's kind of funny. It's kind of seen as you in a college dorm room and you get something simple like a little star on your leg or whatever. I just follow up with people and am like, "Well, here's my Instagram. You can look at what I'm doing. It's definitely not what you're thinking." I also think it's really cool because you don't need a tattoo machine to follow the practice.

**G: Yeah, I feel like hand-poked is more accessible in that way. Where you can just do it, whether it's a good idea or not.**

M: It's a bit more accessible and it's a little less invasive and a trauma to your body. I think that can also make people feel better about it. It's less scary and loud.

**G: Absolutely. I have two stick and pokes and those experiences were my favorite tattoo experiences that I've had. And I have 12 tattoos, so I'd like to think I have a touch of tattoo experience. It felt way more intimate and it was more of a calming experience versus like me sweating and shaking in the chair. You know what I mean?**



M: And I think to some extent it leaves room for silence and almost a meditative space as well as conversation. There's nothing that you're yelling over and not as much of a disconnect between the parties involved.

**G: We kind of went away from this question, but this next one is just kind of a follow up, but why do you think there is a stigma around tattoos?**

M: I think culturally, this Eurocentric idea is ingrained that tattoos are not a normal thing. That's another thing, for the past 100 years, people haven't been allowed to have tattoos because they're associated with certain things like crime, prison, or whatever else. So, in modern, white centered society, that's something that's not always viewed in a positive way,



especially in a professional sense. Even just growing up hearing that too, just in general, like "if you're gonna get a tattoo, you want to hide it, you don't want to show it."

**G: Yeah, people just say to get it somewhere you can hide it, like don't get any on your hands or neck.**

M: Just all of those little things that are kind of thrown at you as you grow up and learn that it's there, it's in the world.

**G: Yeah, absolutely. We're about to wrap up, so these are some final questions. Where do you see tattooing in the future? And how do you think hand poked tattoos will exist in that realm?**



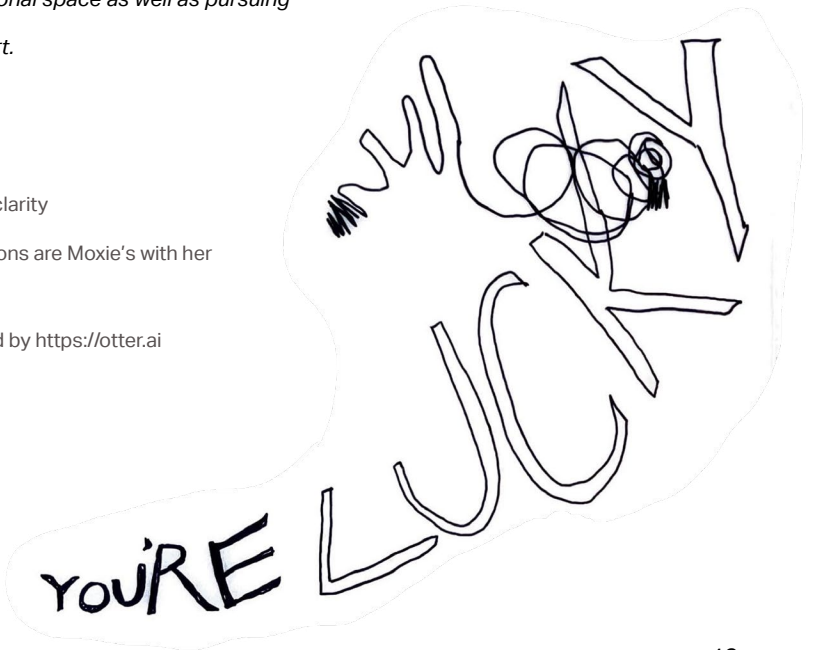
M: I'm hoping that there's an expansion of artists that are doing their own work and doing their tattoos. Like creating their own style and using that. And just more people doing hand poke in a professional sense. I'm hoping that can grow and there can be a place for that. That's where I see myself working. That would be pretty cool, if it doesn't die out.

*Moxie plans to proceed with her hand poked tattooing as a hobby and job until the end of college. After graduating, she is interested in getting a studio space and continuing her exploration of tattooing in a professional space as well as pursuing her own art.*

edited for clarity

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# *o u t r o*

I think there's something to be said of stick and pokes. They've been here a long time. They've experienced the world. They've existed globally. They've had an impact. They've survived colonization. They've contributed to culture. And they're still alive today.

I feel like people are quick to assume that a stick and poke is a lesser version of a tattoo. People may associate them with a DIY way of getting a tattoo. They may assume that it was done at home in unsanitary conditions, or done out of desperation. But this view doesn't have to be an end all be all reputation of hand poke tattoos.

O r t u o

They've existed in the most beautiful places. They've held the most astounding significances. And the practice itself is one that should not be lost to a fast and technology driven world. There is something beautiful about the fact that this practice has been happening for thousands of years and it's still a practice we use today for its original purpose. Hand poke tattoos are historical, and I hope they make it through the future.

Thank

you

and

get

poked.

- Geneva Lindsley

