

BODY ART: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Coordinators: Marilyn Evans and Sara Petitt

Body Art is used to alter appearances and create effects. The study group explores body art's historic origins, as well as current cultural and political implications, domestically and internationally. Neanderthal to contemporary practices are reviewed, as well as aspects of cultural relativism. Are tattoos, piercings and scarifications culturally much different from rhinoplasty, silicone implants and face lifts? The readings and videos explore the human, societal, theatrical, beautification, criminality and identity issues that comprise this subject. Participants are encouraged but not required to develop and read short essays about a weekly topic. Additionally, guest speakers further explore personal insights about body art.

Readings and other Materials:

Body Art by Nicholas Thomas, {Thames and Hudson, ISBN 9780500204207}.

Supplemental Readings and Videos: Articles are distributed weekly related to each week's issue topic. Short optional essays can be developed and read by participants about each week's topic. Each session includes a 10-15 minute You Tube exploration.

Marilyn Evans has worked within nine cultures and traveled within many more, observing and contemplating cultural differences, including body art. She will explore her own cultural biases. **Sara Petitt**, a teaching professional for the last 40 years, also has traveled widely and observed many cultural traditions. As a textile designer, this decorative element has long fascinated her.

*** * * * * Syllabus – A Work in Progress * * * * ***

Week 1: Overview of definitions, scope of course, history of body art and its HUMANITY (chapter one), embracing societal values through individual's bodies. Presentation by a tattoo artist.

Week 2: The topic of SOCIETY (chapter two) explores the relationship of body art to politics and systems of governance. The significance of tattoos and body art varies in different societies and can range from heroism to invoking fear, as well as having spiritual meaning.

Week 3: Body art's THEATRICALITY (chapter three) allows temporary

assumptions of characters to dramatize cultural myths and histories or just to entertain. The importance of masks and the origins of performance art will be discussed.

Week 4: Topic of BEAUTY (chapter four) examines what constitutes “beauty” in different societies and cultures. Personal beautification has had diverse expressions throughout history. A guest speaker will discuss aesthetic and spiritual meaning of tattoos in Western culture.

Week 5: CRIMINALITY (chapter five) explores tattoos use throughout history to identify slaves and members of penal colonies. During the Nazi regime, tattoos were used for identification, as well as to impose a violation of religious belief to many concentration camp victims.

Week 6: IDENTITY (chapter six) and the body art renaissance in Western culture will be explored. Participants will be asked to consider whether their attitudes towards body art have expanded or changed during the course. Distribution of metallic tattoos will be given for peers use, if desired.