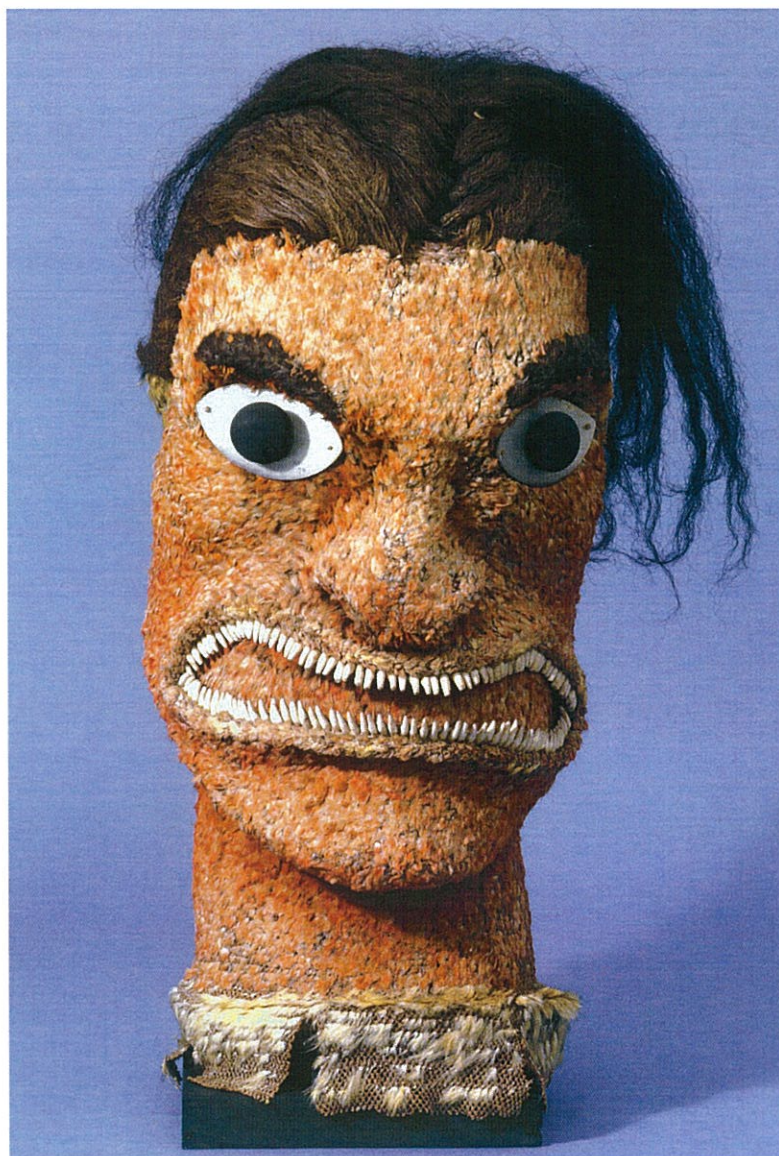


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Mangos, Therese and John Utanga. *Patterns of the Past: Tattoo Revival in the Cook Islands*. Auckland: Punarua Productions, 2011.

Anne E. Guernsey Allen, reviewer
Professor of Fine Arts
Indiana University, Southeast

When Arnold Rubin's *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* was published in 1988, the idea that tattoo and other body modifications should be considered art was both a new and, for some, a threatening idea. Fast forward to 2013 and that bias seems to have faded from view. Just put the word tattoo into the Amazon.com search engine alone and one will get over 7,000 hits. JSTOR will pull up 4049 articles. "Tattoo art" in Amazon results in a little more than 2,700 books. Add the term "university press" and one gets 14 volumes that easily fit the category of scholarly. (Key in variations such as tattooing or body modification and the list of relevant academic works grows.) *Patterns of the Past: Tattoo Revival in the Cook Islands* by Therese Mangos and John Utanga deserves the right to be included in the list of scholarly works.

Patterns of the Past began as an attempt to solve a mystery; where is the information on pre and early post-contact Cook Islands tattoo? As a result of the suppression of this art form by the Christian missionaries who came to the islands, the tattoo vanished from sight, going underground or disappearing altogether. In order to discover and piece together existing information, the authors had to scour numerous archives. Like any good mystery, clues were gleaned from a myriad of diverse sources, including the writings of explorers, ethnographers, colonial administrators, and, yes, missionaries. Yet none of these accounts provided more than crumbs. Further evidence was gathered by examining objects and considering the aesthetics of early Cook Island art. The first depictions of Cook Islanders by Western artists (and the subsequent transforma-

tion of such images over time), archaeological evidence, and a variety of non-tattoo practices, such as scarification, were employed in the search as well. In the end, in their consideration of the past, Mangos and Utanga, also found a renaissance that brings us into the present and points to the future.

The writing in *Patterns of the Past* follows an overall format. Each major section has a somewhat general overview that is further fleshed out in sub-units. The forward materials are made up of a preface and an introduction to the legend of 'Ina, who is credited in Cook Islands mythology with the birth of tattoo. After these short bits, the three major units are "The Cook Islands," "Tātatau" and "Patterns." "The Cook Islands" provides a summary of the Polynesian migrations and settlement of the archipelago, through the arrival of the Europeans, to independence and the establishment of communities of Cook Islanders outside the homeland. We are also introduced to the social structure and religious beliefs of early Cook Islands society.

The second large section, titled "Tātatau," begins with an overview of the processes and technology of this art form as it was once practiced in the Cook Islands. Here Mangos and Utanga also establish the historical framework of their research: the descriptions by the missionaries and others, the numerous studies by Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter H. Buck) from 1911 to 1934, the 1992 Festival of Pacific Arts, and now. This introduction is followed by a subsection on "European Encounters," which provides more in-depth data gleaned from the reports of early visitors, including the work of European artists. The third part

of this larger division is “Scarification and the Absence of Tātatau.” Here, in noting the lack of tattoo in the northern atolls of the archipelago, the authors rely on the work of Alfred Gell in regards to the social implications of body marking or their dearth. Was scarification in both the northern and southern Cook Islands an attempt to mark the skin in a systematic way? The available information is inconclusive. The final subsection of “Tātatau” is “The Renaissance.”

“The Renaissance” is the largest individual subdivision in the book and includes discussions of five contemporary *ta’unga tātatau* (tattoo masters.) The authors argue that the revival of Cook Islands tattoo began in the 1980s, but saw its first international expression at the 1992 *Festival of Pacific Arts* held there on Rarotonga. The festival’s theme of traditional voyaging led to an interest in other long-dormant arts, including tattoo. An art form that was in essence private, being practiced mainly on friends of young artists eager to develop their skills, would soon become more public, inspiring others to take up the craft. The following biographies provide a wealth of information on the development, philosophies, and history of each of these artists, all seminal to the resurgence of *tātatau* in the Cook Islands. Much of this information is presented in the artists’ own words.

The final major section of the book is “Patterns.” Here the authors expand their research into a myriad of Cook Islands arts in order to try to understand the possible aesthetic underpinnings of *tātatau* design. Overall, this is also the most in-depth section when taken as a whole.

Even though the missionaries suppressed *tātatau* as a practice, this would not have an immediate impact on the knowledge of patterns, which would have been redirected into other art forms and condoned practices, such of the

lashing of timbers with sennit, the carving of lintels in houses, and the adornment of clothing. This is also what happened in the construction of coral churches throughout the Cook Islands, where these patterns exist in many of the carved pillars and friezes. (111)

Such survivals seem to be particularly strong in women’s art: mats, tapa, hats, and today the beautiful quilts called *tivaevae*. Much of the early information is derived from the writings of Walter Gudgeon, British and New Zealand resident agent in the Cook Islands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the 1926 field study by Te Rangi Hiroa on Aitutaki. Consequently, short biographies of these men are included. The rest of this section is devoted to discussions of the various designs and motifs found on art from different islands in the archipelago. For example, the staff gods and other *atua* (gods) collected on Aitutaki, carved *vaka* (canoes) and ceremonial adzes from Mangaia, and mats and the ubiquitous fisherman’s god from Rarotonga are considered, with a history of each of these object types, including early accounts of them. Thus, the reader is given a wealth of information both relevant to and beyond the scope of tattoo.

All in all, *Patterns of the Past* is a visually stunning and intriguing work. The photography by Kristy Griffin alone, as well as the images supplied by various museums and archives, makes buying this book worthwhile for anyone with an interest in historical and contemporary Pacific art, Cook Islands’ culture, and tattoo. The writing is engaging and clear, the result in part I am sure of John Utanga’s experience as a journalist and television director. At the same time, this book is more than a coffee-table tome. Mangos and Utanga have made a true contribution to the scholarship of tattoo. They have beautifully pieced together information from a myriad of di-

verse sources. The bibliography is a treasure trove for those interested in the history and heritage of the Cook Islands. Sometimes there are holes in the discussion and some may call for more a more formal, scholarly approach. However, *Patterns of the Past* is an example of a much too rare phenomena: the book that is both useful to scholars while being fully accessible to a more general audience. It is a manuscript that bridges the divide between works such as Gell's theoretically rooted *Wrapping In Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* and pop books like *The Mammoth Book of Tattoos* by Lal Hardy.

References

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