

INK*

4 September 2024 – 2 March 2025

ANTHONY DOMINGUEZ | GLACE 3000 | HERBERT HOFFMANN | FRITZ HORTIG |
GOLDA KRACKS & MAX WERNLI (ONCE UPON A TIME) | SUSAN TÜTSCH (WORLD'S END)

We have always tried to change our bodies, to shape them the way we like. We press and shape, cover and colour them — with the decision to get a tattoo being one of the most radical. The skin becomes a canvas that knows no rules. More and more of these canvases are now roaming the streets; tattoos have long since become socially acceptable. While ink images on the skin are almost omnipresent in everyday life, they are rarely viewed through the lens of art. Even less often does the subject find its way into museums. Why is that? What does it do to our understanding of art when the canvas is alive? And how do we view the (artistic) form of expression when we bring it into the museum and raise it onto the high pedestal of art?

Herbert Hoffmann

If anyone deserves the title of maestro of tattoo artists, it is Herbert Hoffmann from Hamburg. Even 14 years after his death, his name still makes many people sit up and take notice. Hoffmann? That's the man who brought tattooing out of the dingy corner in the 1960s, who with his enthusiasm knew how to infect many a doubter with the tattoo fever, who moved to Appenzell in the 1990s and also made a huge impression on the Swiss tattoo scene — and, above all, left many tattoos.

Born in rural Pomerania in 1919, Herbert Hoffmann was fascinated by tattoos from a young age and delighted in every ink splash that peeked out from under the sleeves of labourers and ordinary people. After the trained merchant's assistant was released from Russian captivity in 1949, he finally picked up a tattoo needle himself — and gradually built up his small empire in Hamburg.

In his notes, Hoffmann speaks of a deep longing, of fascination and joy, he feels about his tattoos — whether on his own body or on the bodies of others. The so-called Hoffmann anchor has become particularly famous — and the location of Hoffmann's first studio in St. Pauli was probably influential, since it is an area where many sailors congregated.

More than almost any other tattoo artist, Herbert Hoffmann has influenced entire generations of tattoo fans and made a decisive contribution to making drawings on the skin socially acceptable.

Susan Tütsch

For Susan Tütsch, tattooing is a “community thing”. The 53-year-old has been injecting drawings under her customers' skin for over 30 years. “The customer comes to me with an idea, I'm the hand and I have the experience. I advise them, give them input — and if the collaboration works, I realise the commission in drawings.” When asked whether tattooing is more of a service than an artistic endeavour, Tütsch's answer is a resounding yes and no. For her, the world of tattoos is a genre in its own right.

In 1992, the trained florist was one of the first women in Switzerland to venture into Hells Angels-dominated territory of tattooing. She was soon able to secure her place in it, a development that is anything but self-evident, especially as the tattoo community was quite small at the beginning of the 1990s and the knowledge of materials and techniques was guarded like a treasure.

Speaking of treasure: just as tattoo artists back then preferred to keep their expertise to themselves, Susan Tütsch carefully stores the drawings that she has transformed into tattoos over the years in huge boxes and folders. “This is what remains of what I do all the time.” There must be hundreds of drawings that she has collected in her flat above the studio — all unique pieces that are now travelling the world on some back, shoulder blade or ankle. Even though the tattoos (usually) remain on the wearer's skin for a lifetime, for the tattoo artist herself, they cease to be tangible as soon as the customer leaves the shop.

Glance 3000

Adrian Schär normally earns his living with large-format works on canvas. From time to time, however, he swaps his paintbrush for a tattoo needle and dons his alter ego called Glance 3000. Friends and acquaintances then get a tattoo from the 35-year-old. The album of so-called flashes — pre-drawn motifs that are transferred one-to-one onto the skin — consists of drawings of indoor palms, bialeTTis, drills whatever comes to Glance 3000's mind. As soon as a flash is under the skin as a tattoo, the template in the book is marked with a small sticker. ‘Anything with a dot is sold — and gone.’ A second tattoo with the same motif? There is no such thing.

The fact that Glace 3000 is as relaxed as he is consistent in his tattooing is also due to where he sees himself. He is neither a tattoo artist nor a service provider, but an artist who tattoos on the side. When tattooing, there is no expectation that the tattoo has to be “good” or can even be considered art. This may be one of the reasons why Glace 3000 has opted for the so-called ‘ignorant style’, a style reminiscent of children’s drawings. In general, his tattoos are not about perfection, but rather about the process and the interaction with the person sitting opposite him. The result — the tattoo — is therefore only a snapshot for Schär. He is relaxed about the fact that this moment is forever on the skin and may no longer be pleasing at some point: “If you’re having a bad time and you get a tattoo that says ‘Fuck love’, it doesn’t have to be relevant in 20 years’ time. But it was important in 2024.”

Video Installation

Bringing tattoos into the museum? It can be done. The only question is: how? After all, the surface on which the ink is painted or engraved is not made of woven hempflax, dried animal skin or pressed wood fibres — but of skin. Human skin that sweats, breathes and ages and can hardly be locked away in a museum to be scrutinised from all sides. But what the skin or the person it covers can do is tell a story. That’s why we gave eight tattoo artists and tattooed people, as well as a curator, the floor to tell us their own views of the profession (or the craft, the art?) in front of the camera:

- **Daniel Baumann**, Director of Kunsthalle Zurich
- **Fritz Hortig**, artist and tattooist
- **Golda Kracks & Max Wernli**, owners of Once Upon a Time studio in Zurich and former „students“ of Maxime Plescia-Büchi
- **Thomas Meyer**, writer (e. g. *Wolkenbruchs wunderliche Reise in die Arme einer Schickse, Trennt euch!*)
- **Mike the Freak**, tattoo fan
- **Maxime Plescia-Büchi**, tattooist, designer and founder of tattoo studio Sang Bleu
- **Adrian Schär aka Glace 3000**, «artist who tattoos on the side»
- **Susan Tütsch**, one of the first female tattooists in Switzerland (*World’s End Tattoo*)

Where do they locate their (artistic) practice between the mainstream and the museum, what meaning do tattoos have for them, and what does it do to the tattoos when they are presented in a museum context? Neither we nor the protagonists of the video installation want to nor should provide definitive answers to these questions; it is more about opening up a space for discussion,

getting to know different perspectives and thereby also questioning our own attitude towards tattoos. Perhaps we will be confirmed in our thinking, or perhaps we will completely overturn it or form a completely new opinion about the pigments under our skin.

The film installation resulting from the conversations is a collaboration between the Musée Visionnaire, Remo Krieg (camera) and Kevin Graber (sound). The film was directed by Manuela Hitz.

Maxime Plescia-Büchi

For Maxime Plescia-Büchi, ‘home’ is not just where his family is, but also where he tattoos. The 46-year-old turned his passion for the ink under his skin into a profession around 15 years ago. The ECAL graduate is now one of the best-known and most successful tattoo artists in Switzerland. With his studio Sang Bleu, which has branches in London, Los Angeles and New York in addition to the tattoo studio in Zurich, Maxime Plescia-Büchi has given space to his very own vision of tattooing — and the (craft) art behind it.

The tattoo artist, who lives in the USA, is currently working on a new studio concept in New York.

Fritz Hortig

Fritz Hortig’s art is loud, colourful and full of expression; each ‘piece’ is an exclamation mark that puzzles you or makes you smile. The words and scraps of sentences in his works are notes that have become images, on which the Austrian sets down his impressions. They are the result of a kind of introspection that he began around 15 years ago — and which continues to this day. After experiencing burnout, Fritz Hortig decided to quit his job as an event manager and start travelling and writing. The fact that his thoughts could also find their way onto surfaces other than paper — such as textiles and T-shirts — was more of a coincidence.

Time and again, Hortig also leaves his art on skin — in the form of tattoos. Just like his T-shirts, his tattoos are characterised by a rawness and immediacy reminiscent of various forms of street art. Perfection? There is no such thing. This approach is no coincidence. Around ten years ago, the left-handed artist decided to hold the pencil in his right hand when drawing. Not to subject himself to long-outdated misconceptions, but rather to turn his back on perfectionism. “I always had the feeling that I couldn’t draw at all. Then came the saving thought: I’ll just do everything with my right hand!” According to Hortig, the dominant hand would succumb more easily to perfectionism, whereas perfection is unattainable for the

nondominant hand anyway.

Perhaps imperfection is the only rule that governs Fritz Hortig's works — and which makes his art even more accessible. The fact that the 42-year-old often turns the human body into a canvas makes the threshold even lower. We can cover ourselves in Hortig's art — or have it inked under our skin. In this way, Fritz Hortig not only shakes up our traditional understanding of art, but also shows us new ways in which art can become part of our everyday lives.

Anthony Dominguez

Perhaps he could have become an 'established' artist and entered the art scene through the front door. But Anthony Dominguez decided to take a different path. The American moved from Texas to New York at the end of the 1980s, not to chase the American Dream in the Big Apple, but rather to leave everything behind. He dropped out of art school and, after a nervous breakdown, decided to throw his belongings in the rubbish bin and spend the rest of his life as a "homeless wanderer" on the streets of New York.

Passers-by may have seen Dominguez as another homeless person or an anarchist punk, but he always considered himself free. Art, however, remained a faithful companion to him on the street. He cut out stencils from found plastic folders, placed them on black denim and discoloured the spaces in between with bleach, which he drew up in syringes. He sewed these round patches onto his clothes. "Anthony actually wore his art on his body", says gallery owner Aarne Anton. "The patches were a way of communicating without words." He wore the painted clothing like a second skin, allowing him to express himself while at the same time isolating himself from the world.

With his work, Anthony Dominguez not only provides an insight into life in America in the early 1990s, but he is also an unmistakable successor to Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. The burgeoning hip-hop culture and punk vibes are just as palpable in his works as his ambivalence towards underground and mainstream cultures, of the art on the street and that which made it into the art galleries of the East Village — the very neighbourhood Dominguez wanted to leave behind.

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