

# Tattoos make body a work of self expression

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
STAFF WRITER

Marina Vainshtein uses her skin as a canvas to express her feelings about the Holocaust. The 23-year-old Jewish woman is one of the topics being covered during a daylong conference on tattooing April 5 at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"Getting Inked: The Art of the Tattoo" will look at the history of tattoo as an art form, its manifestations in contemporary culture, and the reasons behind various artistic movements and styles.

Topics and speakers include "The Tattooed Jew," by Dora Apel, adjunct art history professor at Wayne State University; "Tattooing as a Medium," by Don Ed Hardy, internationally known artist; "Framing Tattoos: From Bodily Disfigurement to Work of Art," by Murre DeMolloy of San Francisco University's

**Getting Inked:  
The Art of the Tattoo**  
What: A conference covering the history of tattoo and manifestations of the art form in contemporary culture.  
When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, April 5.

Where: Detroit Institute of Arts, Lecture Hall, 5200 Woodward Avenue.

Cost: \$15, \$12 for Founders Society members, free to students with current ID. Preregistration required. Call (313) 833-2323.

Sign language interpreter available upon request, call (313) 833-4249 or the hearing impaired can call (313) 833-1454 during regular business hours.

anthropology department; "Skin and Site," by Alice Joanou of the

San Francisco Art Institute, and "Tattooing and Youth Cultures" by Daniel Wojcik from the University of Oregon English department.

Tattooing, an ancient form of self expression, is gaining respect as an art medium according to Isabella Basombrio, assistant curator of the DIA's education department.

"Tattooing is developing into an art form that requires drawing skills and conceptual skills. There's a different consciousness now, the consciousness of tattoo artists as artists," said Basombrio, who conceived the idea for the conference.

The art of tattooing hails back to Egyptian times. Tattoos found on mummies date around 2,000 B.C. Polynesians used tattoos to denote social standing and for other purposes, and decorative tattoos were a sign of beauty. Tattooing is practiced by many

different cultures. The attitude with which a society regards tattoos varies with location.

"The meaning of tattoo is very different in tribal cultures," said Basombrio. "Tattoo artists are respected in tribal tattooing. In Western culture, tattoos are being related to a biker culture."

Apel became interested in tattooing, and the use of skin as canvas, as part of a larger project she's researching on post war imagery of the Holocaust. During the lecture "The Tattooed Jew" Apel will theorize about why Vainshtein would create images of the Holocaust over her entire body.

Born in Ukraine, Vainshtein was instilled with a strong sense of Jewish identity because her grandfather fought in the Red Army against the Nazis and heard the stories of a Holocaust survivor. Apel, who interviewed Vainshtein on several occasions, hypothesizes that Vainshtein

was traumatized by the survivor's transmission and "became a surrogate witness to reclaim the body of the Jews."

"Obviously she was born too late for these events," said Apel. "Jews who need to confront the Holocaust invent new strategies in relation to their own contemporary, late 20th century idea of Jewish identity."

"Tattooing is not a traditional medium but neither is video. Tattoos are endowed with a lot of meaning by the people who create them and the people who use their skin to express themselves."

Typically, in American society, few feel so compelled about a subject to cover their entire body with imagery like Vainshtein's. According to Tom Renshaw, a tattoo artist at Eternal Tattoos in Livonia, customers do, however, get tattoos because of a need to express themselves. Over the

last four years, Renshaw's noticed an increase in the amount of people getting tattoos. The ratio of men to women is about equal.

"It's personal expression," said Renshaw who grew up in Birmingham. "I think more people are getting tattoos because the work is getting better. The art's improved."

Renshaw served an apprenticeship at Eternal Tattoos to learn the trade. Although he studied the visual arts briefly at Michigan State University, Renshaw attributes his skills to on the job experience. He recently won first place at a Detroit tattoo convention for a work featuring a large gorilla. Before beginning a portrait, which is his specialty, Renshaw sketches an outline directly onto the skin.

"Tattoos are a very serious art form," Renshaw said, "because it's permanent."

## Conversation from page C1

Appearing too serious or high-brow might be why some of Hilberry's shows haven't fared so well. And why others should have attracted wider attention, such as this year's exhibits of Judy Pfaff, Kiki Smith and

Michael Luchs.

Two decades ago, Hilberry learned from her mentor, Sam Wagstaff, then-curator for 20th century art at the DIA, that many major contemporary artists and art works were not

making their way to Detroit. Nothing against the Motor City, but it just wasn't considered to be a major part of the American art scene.

Wagstaff was an early supporter of Cass Corridor artists

and inspired Hilberry to bring to Detroit the work of national contemporary artists. In 1976, she started her own gallery with a clear vision.

**Daunting challenge**

Some days, she admits, the challenge seems daunting to persuade, convince or provoke people to educate themselves through art. Yet in her quietly relentless manner, she persists.

"I want to make a living, but I don't want to have to sell work based on the clever, persuasive statements that what I'm showing is the greatest, the best, a sure investment," said Hilberry.

"In the end, it's about art, not business."

The ongoing Opie exhibit is indicative of how Hilberry sees her role to challenge visitors to her gallery.

Many people will take one look at the exhibit's announcement card and either be repulsed or dismiss the show. But Hilberry also realizes that there will be some who will find the exhibit challenging, or to use a catchy phrase, "cutting edge." And perhaps some of those people will visit her gallery, and challenge themselves to suspend judgment, to open up and try to understand what lies beyond superficial

appearances.

"If we can show the work of truly creative people, then maybe people who come in here will begin to see things differently, look at their own lives more openly," she said.

That possibility is why, for Hilberry, art simply cannot be ignored.

Do you have stories about your arts group, an artist or any arts-related issues? Please contact Frank Proenza, (810) 901-2557. Or write to him at the Eccentric Newspaper, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009. Frank covers arts for communities in the Eccentric.

## Glass from page C1

mix techniques as well as mediums.

Miniature glass scenarios of a home office and a wine cellar, lamp worked by Emily Brock, mix found objects like a fountain pen with the glass. Czeslaw Zuber carves large scale lead crystal heads then enamels them with vibrant primary colors. Glass work by Leah Wingfield and husband Stephen Jon Clements bears influences of African art.

Mystical worlds reside inside glass boxes by Sydney Cash. Movement in John Healy's work becomes apparent as viewers take in different angles. Previously, the International avoided styles such as the Pop Art of Evan Snyderman. This year Snyderman's vintage glass camera, table-top cooling fan and iron recapture the romance of a bygone era.

"The International will be an

important cultural event," said Hampton. "A glass exhibition in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art drew tens of thousands of people. We have the same artists who were at the Metropolitan in the International here at Habatat."

Glass as an art material is one of the fastest growing art mediums today but its beginnings were not as lustrous. Until the 60s, glass was created by teams of blowers in factories belonging to such famous glass houses as Tiffany and Steuben.

It wasn't until 1962 that the American contemporary studio glass movement was born when Harvey Littleton held a week-long series of hot glass workshops in a storage shed behind the Toledo Museum of Art. Littleton, known as the father of the contemporary studio-glass movement, built a furnace prior to the workshops as an experi-

ment to prove artists could blow glass individually in studios.

Only 15 percent of the art Hampton exhibited at the original Habatat Galleries in Dearborn was devoted to glass. Eventually, Hampton found glass so alluring he decided to show nothing but glass in the gallery locations which followed in Southfield and Farmington Hills. Entranced by glass's beauty, Hampton has followed the progression of the movement as artists pushed the medium beyond preconceived limits over the last 25 years for one reason.

"What excites me is seeing the work coming in and watching the artists mature and evolve," said Hampton. "Many of the pieces are functional forms that don't pretend to fine art yet make some of the most significant statements ever made. It will be interesting to see several hundred years from now the significance it brings to mankind."

## Writer from page C1

cerned with telling an old-fashioned mystery aimed at revealing the menace of generational hatred.

But before the depth of the British-Irish feud can be contemplated, Perry grabs the reader's attention with a murderous crime at could change the course of history.

With uncanny attention to Victorian detail, "Ashworth Hall" begins on a hopeful note. Irish Protestants and Catholics have gathered, albeit reluctantly, to discuss home rule for Ireland, a problem that dates to the reign of Elizabeth I. The controversial chairman of the meeting, Ainsley

Greville, is guarded by Thomas Pitts, whose sister-in-law owns the estate. Greville is key to a peaceful resolution of Ireland's troubles.

When Greville is found murdered, however, the peace negotiations are threatened. Soon the Pitts realize that one of the guests at Ashworth Hall is the murderer. More murders will certainly follow if the guilty party isn't revealed. Meanwhile, as the Pitts discuss the murderous trail, Ireland percolates on the brink of civil war.

"I'm not supporting one side or the other," said Perry. "I think it comes down to having the virtues of compassion, courage and integrity. Without courage to do what's right, all else is in jeopardy."

Readers are attracted to the Victorian age setting in her novels, said Perry, because of the similarity between the issues of that era and current times.

"There seems to be common questions that people ask at the end of the century," she said. "Questions about what we believe in, and questions about the role of women."

Coming after the critically acclaimed "Weighed in the Balance," for which she received the Edgar nomination, "Ashworth Hall" could provide Perry's breakthrough to the top of the book charts. Eventually, she hopes her stories find a broader audience. Within the next several months, she expects to sell the rights to her first book, "The Cater Street Hangman," to British television.

When reminded that recent successful films such as "Emma," "Pride and Prejudice" and Henry James' "Portrait of a Lady" were based on novels set in Victorian England, Perry smiled broadly.

"You don't have to convince me," she said.

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