

Culture

Tattoo and dance: the cultural revival

As early as the 18th European navigators indicated the existence of tattooing in Tahiti.

Tattooing was prohibited at the time of the missionaries, but it didn't disappear completely. For Polynesians, tattooing is a means of asserting their ma'ohi cultural identity and it favours the use of black colour to the detriment of others. Inspired from vegetal or animal geometry, most of the time a tattoo has a symbolic meaning.

Men and women display the tattoo like jewelry.

Thus, contrary to the "occidental intimist" approach, the tattoo was first meant to be seen at first.



They also employ volcanic stone, coral and even bone to fashion hundreds of decorative and useful items such as "penu", food pounders.

And lastly, the re-development of the mother of pearl industry has made available the subtle iridescence of these polished shells.

The fascinating changing colors have been incorporated to embellish dance costumes and in the making of shimmering jewelry.

For several years now, there has existed a new generation of particularly gifted tattoo artists in Tahiti and her Islands whose talents are more and more solicited by the passing tourists.

In addition, these tattoo artists now export their art by participating in various shows abroad.

Artistic expression can also be seen in woodcarving, the prerogative of men. For this they carve, as the mood inspires them, ancestral graphic and symbolic designs in precious woods such as "tou", a local variety of purple wood, and "miro" or rosewood. Marquesans excel in this area and produce superb pieces, spears, war clubs and "umete" or fruit bowls, which can be used as a large dish.

