



REBECCA UNGER Hi-Desert Star

This Rashaida women of the Sudan is an Orthodox Muslim, whose faith requires that her face be veiled for modesty. Her face is covered by a heavily-jeweled mask called an arusi.

By Rebecca Unger
Hi-Desert Star

We want a show about tattooing!" members of the Yucca Valley Youth Commission told their supervisor.

Lynn Richardson enlisted Copper Mountain College professor Dean Pieper and his cultural geography students to help her expand on the subject. They created "Eye of the Beholder," the current exhibit on beauty and culture at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum.

"Our makeup models must look pretty bland to many of these other cultures," Richardson quipped as she pointed to a group

Being beautiful can be a real BEAST

of airbrushed Western magazine ad layouts. "Some men would look at them and wonder where their scars are."

The exhibit starts with prehistoric artifacts and rock paintings that show human bodies decorated with geometric designs. Many of the mineral paints used then are still used today, like ochres, manganese and lime.

Tattooing, puncturing the skin to insert pigment, is one of the permanent body adornments featured in the exhibit. Visitors will learn how traditional Polynesian tattooists tap a needle with a small hammer, while the Japanese use bundles of needles set in wooden handle. Many 18th-century sailors were intrigued by encounters with these cultures and submitted to their tattoo methods. But the electric tattoo machine revolutionized the practice and is still the Western preference for swabbies and land lubbers alike.

Body piercing, once the staple of National Geographic pictorials, has resurfaced as a popular form of decoration. The piercings passed down from ancient peoples to today's traditional cultures are used to mark comings of age, marriage or leadership, the museum exhibit shows.

Richardson's photographs and memorabilia trace the history of body modification's many



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The marriage-aged women of the Tabwa people of Zaire and Zambia use scarification to prove their strength and their ability to survive child-bearing.

forms, such as skull elongation, foot binding, neck stretching and rib removal. Today, plastic surgery and body building are accepted Western forms of sculpting to societal standards of pulchritude.

Scarification, or cicatrization, is the alteration of skin texture by cutting and controlling the healing process. The museum covers this subject, too, showing how clay or ash inserted into the wounds help make the scars stand out as the skin heals. The process is painful, denotes courage, and has not seen



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A tribesman of Papua New Guinea is decorated for a Sing-sing gathering, where different tribal groups share their traditions in dance and music. The picture is part of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum's exhibit.

widespread use in the modern West.

The exhibit, which includes tattoo and body modification tools courtesy of Strata Tattoo Lab, will be on display in the museum lobby through March 1. A noon lecture by Richardson, complete with henna tattoos, will be held Jan. 19.

"For thousands of years, humans have gone to enormous lengths to change their natural appearance," the show's tour materials observe. "This exhibition presents a sweeping and sometimes startling look at our methods of adornment to achieve what people perceive as attractiveness."



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On display are tools used by a Yucca Valley outfit, Strata Tattoo Lab, to stretch the earlobe.



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Museum Supervisor Lynn Richardson adjusts photographs in her exhibit, showcasing a variety of cultural standards of beauty, character, power and prestige.



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'Eye of the Beholder: Beauty and Culture'

- On display Saturday through March 1.
- Curator's lecture at noon Jan. 19. Free admission and beverages will be served. A henna artist will offer temporary tattoos 1 to 4 p.m.
- The museum is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Admission is free; donations support the educational mission. It is located in the Yucca Valley Community Center complex on Dumosa Avenue north of Twentynine Palms Highway.
- Phone: (760) 369-7212
- Web: www.hidesernaturemuseum.org