

Museum breaks new ground in bold 'Body Art' show

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In a sexy leap away from dinosaurs and rocks, the American Museum of Natural History has taken on a bold new topic — body art.

"This is the most comprehensive show on this topic ever presented by a major cultural institution," said Ellen Futter, the museum's president. "There is no known culture in which people do not paint, pierce, tattoo, reshape or simply adorn their bodies."

Wide-ranging seems an understatement for "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which includes over 600 objects dating from 3,000 B.C. to the present.

It covers everything from photos of lavishly tattooed and scantily clad Japanese rickshaw drivers to videotaped interviews with pierced and tattooed modern Americans, from ancient Egyptian art to Victorian underwear and ethnic postcards.

The rickshaw drivers, forbidden as lower class from wearing the

luxurious garments of the elite, embroidered their bodies with ink instead. Their swirling decorations are as beautiful as the finest kimonos.

The Americans and Europeans who were interviewed tended to tattoo themselves for very personal reasons. In addition to the traditional "Mom" motif, one man was adorned with an image of his child. For many others, body piercing and tattooing is simply fashion.

"I actually couldn't care less what the design is as long as it's the moment, the spirit of the moment," said Dutch tattoo artist Henk Schiffmascher, better known as Hanky Panky.

Greek and Egyptian artifacts reveal images of the adorned bodies of ancient times, and European bras are displayed nearby tiny shoes for Chinese bound feet, as examples of body shaping of various eras and cultures.

A wall of tourist post cards from Africa and other distant places illustrates the way in which

Westerners focus on body art when picturing peoples they consider exotic.

In contrast, non-Westerners watching the West pay more attention to facial hair and clothing. Enid Schildkrout, chairwoman of the museum's anthropology division and the show's curator, said it was hard to put all the disparate displays together as a whole.

"It was kind of tricky ... to figure out how to take things over such a broad geographic range and over such a large time span and tell a clear story where everything just didn't blend into each other in a way that didn't make sense," she said.

But she succeeded, weaving art and anthropology into a single mesmerizing tapestry.

The same techniques and sometimes patterns appear in various parts of

the world in different periods. And in different ways, techniques are often used for the same purposes: to show membership in or differentiation from a certain societal group.

A display case of Zulu ear plugs is shown alongside examples of "neo-tribal" piercing from the United States, forcing one to reconsider the popular trend as a cultural phenomenon.

Clapton, James Taylor among rock hall inductees for 2000

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Rock and blues guitarist Eric Clapton will be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for the third time on March 6, the rock hall foundation announced Tuesday.

The class of 2000 also will include singer-guitarist Bonnie Raitt, singer-songwriter James Taylor, Earth Wind & Fire, Lovin' Spoonful and the doo-wop group the Moonglows, the New York-based foundation said.

The inductions — which will increase to 162 the number of individuals and groups in the rock hall — will be in New York City. The permanent hall of fame exhibit is in Cleveland. The rock hall will induct Nat King Cole and Billie Holiday as early influences on rock music. Arista Records President Clive Davis, whose career began with CBS Records in 1960, will be inducted in the non-performer category.

The first inductees in a new category for side-men who performed with

headliners will be saxophonist King Curtis, bass player James Jamerson, drummers Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer, and guitar player Scotty Moore.

Clapton, who was inducted in 1992 as a member of the Yardbirds and in 1993 as a member of Cream, released his first solo album in 1970. His solo hits include "Cocaine" and "Wonderful Tonight."

Taylor's singing hits include "Fire and Rain" and the duet "Mockingbird" with Carly Simon in 1974. Raitt, a slide guitarist and singer, achieved widespread popularity with the 1989 album "Nick of Time."

Musicians are eligible for nomination to the hall 25 years after the release of their first recording. A committee of rock historians selects nominees, and about 1,000 rock experts vote for induction. Those with the most votes, with a minimum of 50 percent of the vote, are inducted, generally five to seven yearly.

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