

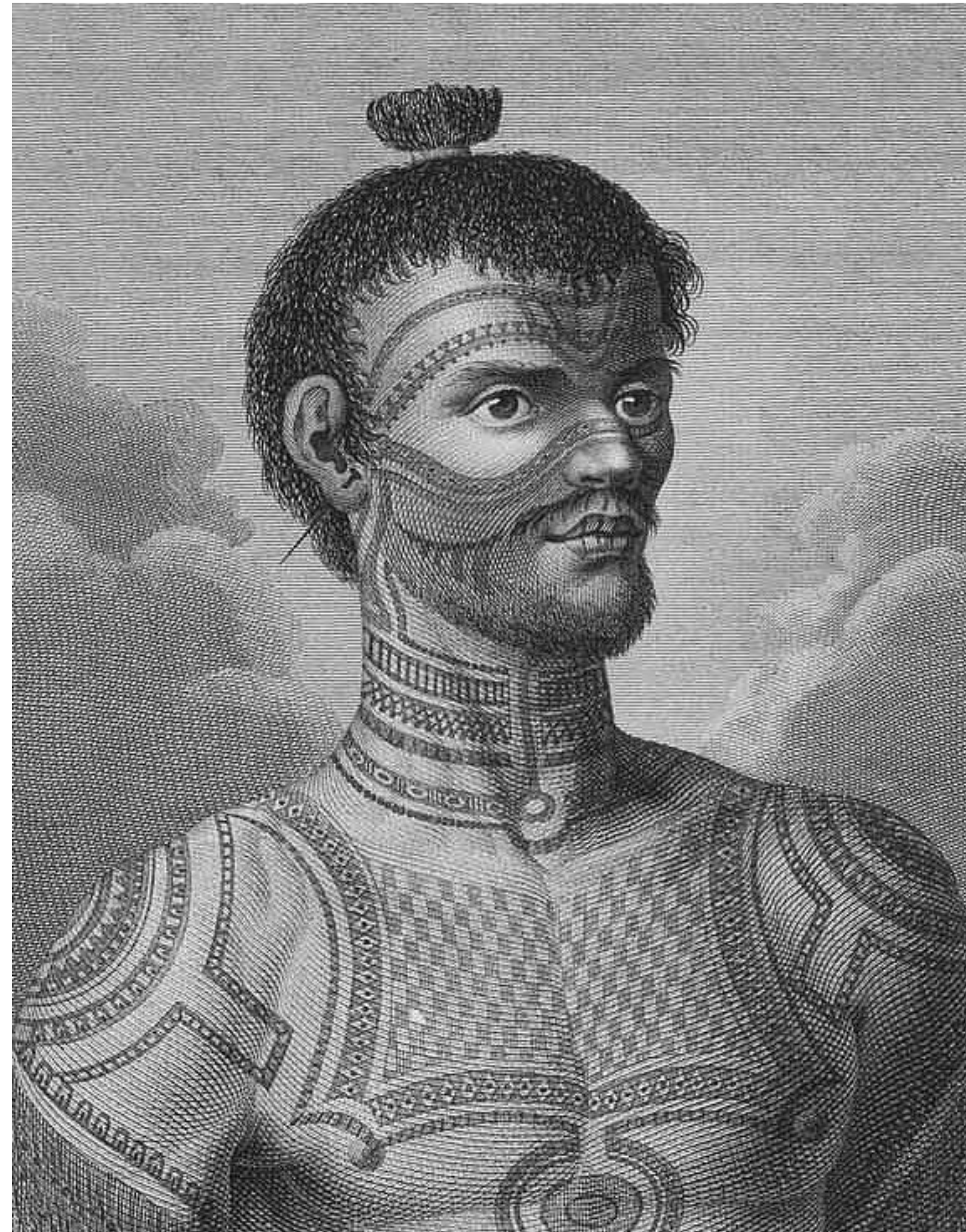
Introduction

The act of humans tattooing themselves and others has been around for almost as long as history has been able to be documented. Fossilized and mummified bodies found in purposeful burial grounds or as a surprise have evidential remnants of tattoos on what is left of the ancient bodies. The tradition of tattooing can be traced through history up until the current day where, thanks to current technology and media, one can easily see tattooing being present all throughout the world.

The persistence of tattoos leads to specific trends in the purpose and meaning of going through the process of getting tattooed. Sharp differences can be seen between tattoo tradition on Oceanic islands and in America. Until European explorers made contact with these groups of islands, the natives there were not aware of other nations in the world. Because of that, any tattoo traditions that are documented from that time are purely the Natives' own. The designs that were created held deep meanings in the tribe and each member of the tribe underwent the process of obtaining the full body design as a way of connection to the others around them. The Natives' tattoo designs did not represent any individual objects, rather they made one single abstract design that held representation to the tribes. The process of getting the tattoo was sacred and outsiders were not allowed to get them, observations by some European explorers were allowed but nothing more.

In contrast, American tattoo designs are a collection of art styles from around the world. The main styles seen in America are those that originate from Japan, photorealism, and bold color recreations of stock images known as flash tattoos. These styles came to America largely during the war through soldiers that would get tattoos abroad and bring them back and then subsequently created the trends. Simply put there is no one distinctive style that was created by America like there was by the Native Islanders. Why is that?

Compared to the rest of the world, America is the baby. It has only existed as a nation for over 200 years while the rest of the nations have had thousands of years to develop. To that point, America has barely had any time to create their own original tattoo style as a people like the Native Islanders did but the other key difference was the isolation of the past. America was built by immigrants coming from overseas making the foundation of the nation from the beginning one that was a collection of other countries' traditions. America is the people and traits of other countries in a way that was not possible in the past, making it impossible for an American tattoo to be anything besides designs and art styles borrowed from nations around the world.



Pictured above is a drawing of a Marquesan male created by W.G. Telesius von Telenau, an artist who, on multiple occasions, was tasked with drawing recreations of Marquesan tattoos based off of extremely detailed firsthand accounts that he was given. In contrast to others of Telenau's depictions on the same topic, this image features only the head and upper torso of the figure, making it easier to view tattoo design detail than it would be in a drawing featuring the whole body length of a person. The design featured follows the Marquesan traditions of using repeating shapes to make patterns that are symmetrically created on both the left and right sides of the body. These full body designs were implemented as a way of showing one's status and as a connection to the tribe.

As a way of comparing the meanings behind tattoos, I was able to use my own tattoos which I have been getting since I was 16 years old. A similarity can be seen between these two distinct situations, my young age when I started getting tattooed and the similar pattern of Native Islanders beginning the tattoo process in the younger years and working on the piece over time. From that point on, things start to differ. Native Islanders tattoo young as a way of beginning the process of becoming a true part of the tribe, my personal tattoos are a form of self-expression and remembrance of certain people. The fact tattoo shown below was an impulse decision after I saw a sketch of the design and wanted to use it to decorate myself. The stars have more meaning, a callback to my childhood reading with my family.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Martin

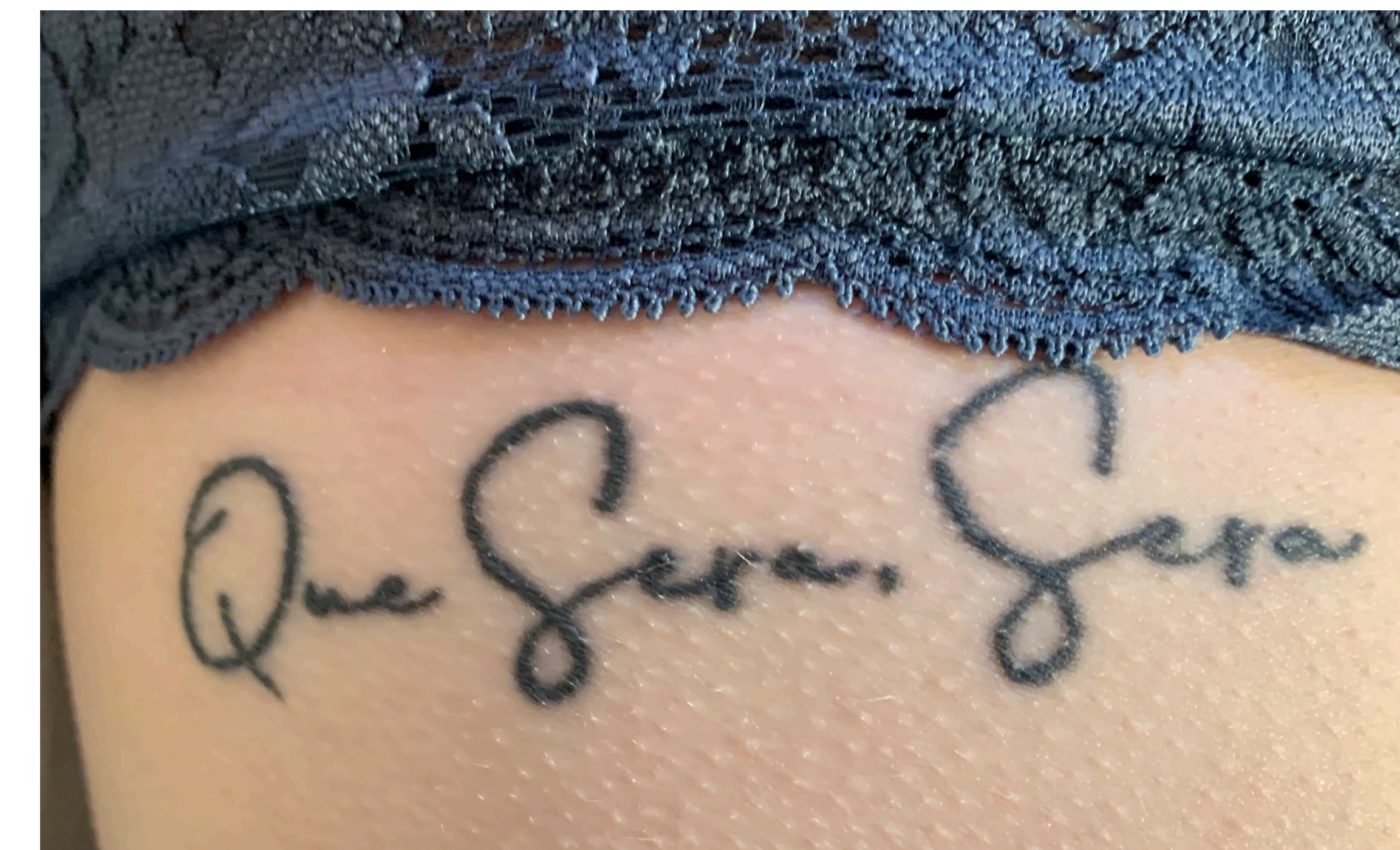


Photo courtesy of Jennifer Martin

It can be clearly observed at a first glance that the styles of my tattoos is extremely varied and eclectic. The art style of distorted faces versus a classic cursive font or a realistic flower recreation (not pictured) is individual to each specific art installment on my body, a stylistic trend that many in America follow when it comes to tattooing, sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. Americans, as a generalization, get tattoos as a form of artistic expression and aesthetics, caring about the look of the finalized piece as a way of embellishing their body in the way they chose. Native Islanders do not choose their designs, instead one continuous and cohesive tattoo covers the body and works as a connection to their family around them.

References

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