



Vintage Tattoo Flash: 100 Years of Traditional Tattoos from the Collection of Jonathan Shaw

Jonathan Shaw

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Vintage Tattoo Flash is a one-of-a-kind visual exploration of the history and evolution of tattooing in America. A luscious, offset-printed, hardcover tome—a beautiful and serious addition to the understanding of one of the world’s oldest and most popular art forms.

Electric tattooing as we know it today was invented in New York City at the turn of the 19th century. In the first days of American tattooing, tattoos were primarily worn by sailors and soldiers, outlaws and outsiders. The visual language of what came to be known as “traditional tattooing” was developed in those early days on the Bowery and catered to the interests of the clientele. Common imagery that soon became canon included sailing ships, women, hearts, roses, daggers, eagles, dragons, wolves, panthers, skulls, crosses, and popular cartoon characters of the era. The first tattooists also figured out that using bold outlines, complimented by solid color and smooth shading, was the proper technique for creating art on a body that would stand the test of time. In the over 100 years since then, techniques and styles have evolved, and the customer base has expanded, but the core subject matter and philosophy developed at the dawn of electric tattooing has persisted as perennial favorites through the modern era.

While most tattoos are inherently ephemeral, transported on skin until the death of the collector, a visual record exists in the form of tattoo flash: the hand-painted sheets of designs posted in tattoo shops for customers to select from. Painted and repainted, stolen, traded, bought and sold, these sheets are passed between artists through one channel or another, often having multiple useful lives in a variety of shops scattered across time and geography. The utility of these original pieces of painted art has made it so that original examples can still be found in use or up for grabs if you know where to look.

Vintage Tattoo Flash draws from the personal collection of Jonathan Shaw—renowned outlaw tattooist and author—and represents a selection of over 300 pieces of flash from one of the largest private collections in existence. *Vintage Tattoo Flash* spans the first roughly 75 years of American tattooing from the 1900s Bowery, to 50s Texas, through the Pike in the 60s and the development of the first black and grey, single-needle tattooing in LA in the 70s. The book lovingly reproduces entirely unpublished sheets of original flash from the likes of Bob Shaw, Zeke Owen, Tex Rowe, Ted Inman, Ace Harlyn, Ed Smith, Paul Rogers, the Moskowitz brothers, and many, many others relatively known and unknown.

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