

PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY
Special Collections
Collection #064-04-03
Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection
c.1875-c.1900, 1980

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Number: 064-04-03

Title: Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection

Creator: Providence Public Library, collector

Dates: c.1875-c.1900, 1980

Quantity: 1.5 linear feet (3 items).

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition: Purchased 2018 & 2019.

Accruals: Accruals are expected.

Custodial history: Materials collected by the Library.

Processed by: The collection was processed by Jessica Rogers-Cerrato in 2022.

Conservation: Not applicable.

Language: Materials are in English & Burmese.

RIGHTS AND ACCESS

Access: This collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Providence Public Library, Special Collections department.

Preferred Citation: Researchers are requested to use the following citation format:
[item number], [item title], Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection, Special Collections, Providence Public Library, Providence, R.I.

Property Rights: Providence Public Library owns the property rights to this collection. Consideration of the copyrights is the responsibility of the researcher.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Separated material Items were split from various accessions and cataloged separately by format. Accession numbers from which materials in this collection derive include: 2018-11-28-001, 2018-12-04-002, 2019-11-25-001.

Published description Not applicable.

Location of originals Not applicable.

Location of copies Not applicable.

Publication note Not applicable.

Subject headings LCSH:
 Tattoo artists
 Women tattoo artists
 Tattooed people
 Tattooed women
 Body marking
 Tattooing--Burma

AAT:
 commercial art
 accordion books

SEE ALSO

- Eddie Pofelr Tattoo Collection, Collection #064-02-01, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Jeff Towns Collection on the History of Tattooing, Collection #105, Special Collections, Providence Public Library. The ephemera portion of this collection includes two sheets of tattoo flash, one Japanese and one American.
- Tattoo Photograph Collection, Collection #064-03-01, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Collection of Tattoo Trade Cards & Business Cards, Collection #064-04-02, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Tattoo Ephemera Collection, Collection #064-04-01, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Providence Public Library's Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection incorporates materials from various acquisitions and purchases related to the art, history, and culture of tattooing, as well as materials on the tattoo industry. The Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection includes artwork created

by tattoo artists typically for display on the walls of tattoo shops or studios. Tattoo flash is defined as a sheet of smaller individual hand drawn images and designs created for the purpose of giving customers ideas for tattoos. These displays may then be copied, mass produced, and sold to other tattoo artists and shops. An individual may choose a design from one of these sheets of different designs (flash) to be tattooed on their body. Most traditional tattoo flash was designed for rapid tattooing and used in "street shops," which are tattoo shops that handle a large volume of generic tattoos for walk-in customers. It is customary for contemporary tattoo shops to decorate their walls with framed sheets of flash. Hand drawn, local flash has largely been replaced in the 21st century by professional "flash artists" who produce and copyright prints of designs for sale at tattoo conventions or online.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection contains sheets of tattoo flash as well as artwork created for the purposes of display within tattoo studios in order to give customers ideas for potential tattoos as well as to demonstrate the artistic style and talents of the tattoo artist.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

The items in this collection have been given titles based on the name of the artist or artists responsible for the work. The collection has been arranged into two series: North American tattoo flash (1) and Burmese tattoo design sample books (2). Within each series, items are alphabetized by the last name of the tattoo artist(s) responsible for the creation of the artwork. Arrangement is based on the name by which the person is best known, which is often that individual's professional or stage name. Where possible, the individual's real name is also included within the description. Where the artist is unknown, "Unknown Artist" is incorporated into the title. Unknown Artist items appear at the end of the series.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Series 1: North American tattoo flash

This series contains tattoo flash sheets and artwork created by tattoo artists and shops most commonly affiliated with or located within North America.

Item	Title	Date	Box	Folder
1	Spaulding & Rogers Flash Sheet Created by Spaulding & Rogers MFG., INC. for Huck Spaulding & Paul Rogers. In 1956, Darwin "Huck" Spaulding (1928-2013) and Franklin "Paul" Rogers (1905-1990) started the mail order supply company Spaulding & Rogers Manufacturing, which went on	1980	1	1

	to become the world's largest manufacturer and distributor of tattooing equipment in the latter half of the 20th century. Dimensions: 10 x 13 inches			
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Series 2: Burmese tattoo design sample books

This series features two Burmese Tattoo Design Sample Books. The books are accordion folded in a style known as parabaik in Burmese. Both design books feature images of mythological creatures such as, but not limited to, centaurs, sphinxes, hydras, and tigers, and one book also includes text annotations and charts alongside the images. This book is likely a reference for both Buddhist astrology and tattoo designs. Such imagery was considered outside of the Buddhist orthodoxy but was locally popular as talismans of good luck and protection. Tattooing has been practiced in Burmese culture for centuries. While the practice was originally imported from China, since at least the 12th century the tradition of tattooing has been integral to many Burmese ethnic groups, where often boys were tattooed as an initiation into manhood and women's faces were inked to beautify them. Each ethnic group has its own guidelines as to where tattoos are to be placed and the parameters of the designs. These tattoos were often thought to imbue the recipient with the characteristics of the subject of the tattoo. The practice was suppressed beginning in the 1930s under British colonial rule as it was associated with various rebel factions, but traditional designs have been reemerging in modern day Myanmar.

Item	Title	Date	Box	Folder
2	Unknown Artist, Burmese Tattoo Design Sample Book (1) Accordion fold paper manuscript (Burmese parabaik) housed in hand carved and painted wood boards. Dimensions: 6.5 x 4 inches	c.1900	1	individual enclosure
3	Unknown Artist, Burmese Tattoo Design Sample Book (2) Accordion fold paper manuscript (Burmese parabaik). Pages dyed black and illustrated in silver with accompanying text. Dimensions: 4.5 x 15 inches	c.1875	1	individual enclosure