

# Chapter 5

## The Rise of Artistic Uncanny: Tattoos

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### **ABSTRACT**

*“Pictorial bodies,” which until recently were the symbol of contradictory images and marginalized groups, are now far from this context. The uncanny image that began to shine in the 1980s began to rise in global media such as cinema, music, and television. Then it spread to daily life. This evolution of the image of uncanny has of course also been experienced in tattooed bodies. These tattooed bodies, which were previously contrary and were hesitant to communicate with people have become very demanding and people who want to be friends, and even people who stay away from tattoos have been tattooed. In addition to the aforementioned situations, even with the tattooed image, even the tattoo making process is anesthetized; the number of those who only want tattoos for tattoos is undeniably increasing. They are often praised for the pain and the sound of the tattoo machine; the whole process is narrated and shared with praise. At this point, the idea stage, design and production process, and finally the image that the tattoo imposes on the body have become a whole narrative.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tattoos are one of the oldest treatments, dating back to the early ages of human history. The tattoo culture reflected on the body in many aspects, such as the transition to adolescence, strength, masculinity, femininity, group affiliation, and identity construction, has undergone many changes in the historical process and has evolved dramatically in recognition of use. This body art, which was previously preferred for different purposes, is mostly applied for identity construction and individual expression in today's postmodern world. Nowadays, identity construction is intertwined with consumer culture. A lot of things are used as a tool in the construction mentioned, from clothing to living spaces, from the personal image to eating and drinking habits. A permanent and image-based implementation, such as a tattoo, has been one of the most efficient ways. In the postmodern era, which is currently dominated by images, the tattoo being an image-driven implementation is gaining ever-increasing popularity in individual expression

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and interpretation. Therefore, examining the tattoo from a body sociology perspective, and since it is an artistic expression based on images, to evaluate it aesthetically would be accurate.

As Kevin Robins spoke, we live entirely in an “age of images.”<sup>1</sup> Images that have become almost a universal language by digitalized communication and globalization penetrates every part of the universe and spreads to every point of the sphere, just like particles released in the atmosphere. It can also be seen from almost every point in the sphere. Within this context, the particle structure, one of the essential features of the postmodern period when “image language” is on the rise, has been integrated into human life and identity construction. Individual identities in which commodities of different styles are created by coming together are precisely the reflection of the age. In the globalizing world, the composite structure that occurs through the erosion of cultural boundaries reveals itself in post-identities and postmodern bodies. The postmodern person, who has turned to a “differentiated similarities” surface, prefers to convey bodily expression, interpretation, and identity building by this image language using the art of tattoo. Diverse styles of tattoos, separated from different cultures through globalization, can now be united in one body. While tattoos made only for aesthetic beauty purposes, they have a lot of meaning regarding their subtext and usage purpose.

It would be wrong to consider the tattoo subject only as of the end product. Yet, tattoo implementation is a whole process with the idea, artistic and application preparation, process, care phase, and finally, its healed state. While the construction phase only moves some people, some can focus on the end product, and even some can only love the pain in practice and get the tattoo done accordingly. Besides, from the perspective of body sociology, tattooing can sometimes transform into a revolution for social domination and sometimes through an individual rule on the body. Tattoos that can be made for dozens of purposes as social expressions, while made at the beginning of the era to receive group loyalty or uncanny image. Today, in addition to these purposes, it has also risen in terms of aesthetics. Today, the number of people who only have a tattoo for a beautiful or rebellious appearance is considerably high.

The “uncanny” image evolves by Hollywood movies, serials, video clips, games, books, social media, and advertisements. Thus, making the uncanny attractive for people who prefer their role models over these channels. For reasons such as the vampires that used to be scary being sexy and making barbarians and murderers attractive, the number of people who want to imitate them is increasing. The aesthetics of mentioned and many more characters and narratives’ romanticization cause the masses to sympathize with these characters and address them. As Freud puts it, the uncanny’s image, a product of fear and curiosity towards the unknown, leaves its body as the unknown becomes known. Today, the rise of uncanny and the increase of curiosity in the social environment for individuals who have this image make these individuals popular in their daily lives. In today’s world, where the attractiveness of fear and curiosity is an unquestionable fact, tattooed bodies meet what is expected.

But long-time studies point out that the perception of tattooed bodies is different in social practices than in the media. Until today, tattoos have been frequently studied and discussed in fields such as sociology, psychology, art, philosophy, and pathology. However, the concepts of subject-body and subject-society, which cannot be thought differently when it comes to tattooing, make it inevitable to maintain the discussion topic with psychology and sociology. In this sense, the prepared study proposes to discuss the artistic and aesthetic value of the tattoo and its psychological and sociological background, centering principally on the historical evolution of tattooing.

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