



Wabori, Traditional Japanese Tattoo: Classic Japanese tattoos from the masters.

By Manami Okazaki

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Wabori, Traditional Japanese Tattoo is an unprecedented collection of interviews from the most prestigious and influential masters of the craft. Included are hundreds of photos from top photo journalists, as well as archival material from the masters albums. The work shown in the book spans 4 decades. The full length interviews give great insight into some of the more subterranean, underworld aspects of Japanese tattooing, as well as the technical aspects of their craft.

Japanese traditional tattoos are typified by a single large narrative or symbolic subject taken from Japanese iconography, which is often embellished with other complimentary elements. The motifs used range from protagonists from folkloric tales, religious deities, to animals -- both mythical and real -- which are then complimented with flowers and maple leaves, and smaller iconography, taking into account the seasonal compatibility of the main subject. While there are many tattoo cultures all over the world, Japanese tattoos are certainly some of the most powerful, aesthetic and holistically balanced, and are nothing short of breathtaking when seen in the flesh.

This book will look at the tattooing tradition that is a continuation of the Edo period tattoo culture, however, there are many regional cultures and communities that have their own culture of tattooing that have existed autonomously from the Edo traditional tattoos. Included are interviews with a woodblock artisan, and the daughter of a yakuza boss who has full body tattoos to show the perspective of a client. This book will inform people wanting to know the relation between the underworld and tattoos and how this relationship is shifting.

Japanese tattoos are some of the most popular tattoo styles internationally and this book will give the reader a glimpse into a hidden and inaccessible world, described with candor from the mouths of the masters themselves. This book will be an indispensable addition to any tattoo artists or aficionados collection.

This book is the result of 8 years worth of getting acquainted with, and interviewing these masters from various regions of Japan, from the South Kyushu island, to the Kansai region, to Tochigi, to Tokyo.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Manami Okazaki is a freelance journalist who has been covering tattoo culture for a number of publications for nearly a decade. Her tattoo related work can be seen in the Wall Street Journal's Scene Asia, the Japan Times newspaper, Cover magazine, Skin Deep, Tatowier, Inked (US), Skin and Ink, Tattoo Master, Tattoo Life, Bizarre, Asian Geographic, various in-flight magazines, and most of the local English language magazines in Japan. She produced and authored Japanese Buddhism x Horiyoshi III and Tattoo in Japan. She has also given tattoo related talks at the Foreign Correspondents Club, Japan.

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It was after WW2 that the yakuza, or Japanese mafia proliferated, as did their love of tattoos. Ostensibly yakuza are offshoots of the otokodate, as well as the kabuki mono rebels of Edo, but became increasingly powerful in Japanese society, becoming involved with extortion, the sex industry, weapons smuggling, as well as legitimate business. Yakuza literally means 8-9-3 which is a losing hand of a gambling game, the objective of which is to get 19. The yakuza would get tattooed, sometimes under order from a superior, to prove their adherence to the group and as a symbol of loyalty and bravado. Some groups even necessitated it, and getting tattooed was a kind of initiation rite. However, despite what the majority of Japanese people believe, there has always been a large contingency of artisans, carpenters and other shokunin who were fully tattooed, as well as tattoo masters who refuse to tattoo underworld members as well. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the yakuza were the staple clientele for several traditional artists until a few years ago.

It is because of the associations with the underworld that there is such harsh, socially sanctioned discrimination against tattooed people in Japan, despite most tattoo artists saying that their yakuza clients are extremely minimal, to zero of late, replaced more so by tattoo fans, who appreciate the aesthetic.

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