



Individual Design in Tattooing as a Superior Aesthetic Strategy: A Case Study of Botanical Tattoos as Embodied Artistic Practice

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ABSTRACT

Tattooing has become a complex art form that's as much about psychology as it is about aesthetics. When someone makes a custom tattoo, it is usually much more meaningful and visually striking than just replicating something. Every Tattoo should be a reflection of what we are, our experiences and what makes us tick as individuals. My research is informed by psychology, anthropology, and body modification studies and views tattooing as a way for people to create their identities and find meaning in their lives. Botanical tattoos are a perfect example, for example, because of their natural feel and how they can be combined with the anatomy of the body. This paper promotes the use of the Hlynska Tattoo Method framework, highlighting the importance of adapting designs to the body shape, blending composition seamlessly and personalizing symbols to make them truly yours. But on the other hand, copycat tattoos can fall flat. They lack depth and emotional significance. But choosing a custom design is more like "living art," something that really becomes part of who you are. The purpose of this paper is to move the conversation around tattoo design from one of style choices to one of a thoughtful process. Individualization is not just important; it is a key way for us to define ourselves and express what we stand for.

KEYWORDS

botanical tattoos, tattoo design methodology, body modification, identity construction, embodiment, personalized tattooing, anatomical adaptation, meaning-making, self-expression, Hlynska Tattoo Method, artistic customization, tattoo psychology.



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Індивідуальний дизайн у татуюванні як вища естетична стратегія: приклад ботанічних татуювань як втілення художньої практики

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Татуювання стало складною формою мистецтва, яка стосується як психології, так і естетики. Коли хтось робить татуювання на замовлення, воно зазвичай набагато змістовніше та візуально вражаюче, ніж просто копіювання чогось. Кожне татуювання має бути відображенням того, ким ми є, нашого досвіду та того, що рухає нами як особистостями. Мої дослідження базуються на психології, антропології та дослідженнях модифікації тіла, і я розглядаю татуювання як спосіб для людей створити свою ідентичність та знайти сенс у своєму житті. Ботанічні татуювання є прекрасним прикладом, наприклад, завдяки їхньому природному відчуттю та тому, як їх можна поєднувати з анатомією тіла. Ця стаття пропагує використання методу татуювання Глинської, підкреслюючи важливість адаптації дизайну до форми тіла, бездоганного поєднання композиції та персоналізації символів, щоб зробити їх справді вашими. Але з іншого боку, татуювання-копії можуть бути невдалими. Їм бракує глибини та емоційного значення. Але вибір дизайну на замовлення більше схожий на «живе мистецтво», щось, що дійсно стає частиною вас. Мета цієї статті — перевести розмову про дизайн татуювань з вибору стилю на вдумливий процес. Індивідуалізація не просто важлива, це ключовий спосіб для нас визначити себе та висловити те, за що ми виступаємо.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

ботанічні татуювання, методологія дизайну татуювань, модифікація тіла, конструювання ідентичності, втілення, персоналізоване татуювання, анатомічна адаптація, створення сенсу, самовираження, метод татуювання Глинської, художня кастомізація, психологія татуювання.

1. Introduction

Tattooing is gaining recognition as an art and personal form of expression across the globe. You see tattoos appearing in all sorts of cultures and communities nowadays [14]. It's not just about looking cool anymore. There are deeper meanings about our identities and emotions. But here's the rub. There's a big contradiction going on. People talk about tattooing as a unique way to express individuality, but many designs end up being pretty uniform or even copied [1; 16].

This really highlights the gap between the personal nature of getting a tattoo and how they're often made. Yeah, knock-offs are quick and easy to whip up, but they completely miss the point of celebrating what makes each person unique. These mass-produced tattoos can feel generic and superficial, making it hard for someone to connect with their ink on a deeper level.

And on the other hand, we have Individual Custom Tattooing, which fits much better with the true essence of tattoo art. Tattoos should be about defining us, changing us, expressing who we are. A study by Weiler et al. [20] showed that people often seek uniqueness in body modification. If you really want to get an effective tattoo design, you need to go beyond copying others; it has to be representative of the individual it is intended for [5; 9].

But the idea extends to not just personal identity, but also to how our bodies look and feel, which is a huge part of how we visually perceive tattoos. The argument here is that custom designs are not only preferable but better than cookie-cutter options because they consider the body, the person's character and their life experiences [20].

The paper supports this by using a variety of fields and offers a structured way to approach custom tattoos by introducing the Hlynska Tattoo Method. Botanical tattoos are a prime example of this. These designs are so versatile and fit so well with different body shapes and placements. From an artistic point of view, it really shows how custom design can add to the aesthetic quality and deeper significance.

Ultimately, viewing tattoo design as a thoughtful process rather than a fad gives insight into how tattooing intersects with art, identity, and physical expression in ways that bind us all.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Tattooing as Identity Construction and Meaning-Making*

Tattooing and the construction and development of identity have become a new set of thoughts over the last fifteen years or so. In contemporary literature, these tattoos are considered tools of self-presentation, in which the participants tell their stories, values and feelings as individuals [1; 16].

This view is consistent with the broader notion of the body as a symbolic medium in which visual markers are just another element in the performance of self-concept and identity [17]. Research into understanding meaning-making suggests that tattoos are not just static images but also dynamic descriptions of an individual's personal experience. Dann and Callaghan have shown how tattoos, even on individual bodies, act as narrative spaces, especially with regard to gender, identity and self-perception [5].

Ifrach refers to the role of tattoos in self-recovery and healing, and in these circumstances personal transformation is especially important [9]. And this line of research is consistent with the fact that tattoos are intrinsically individual expressions, not simply aesthetic choices. The need for specialism drives the adoption of tattoos above all else. Weiler et al. found that individual need is an important predictor of engaging in body modification practices [20].

This finding is also supported by Breivik et al., who link tattooing to more general personality traits concerning expression and differentiation in identity [2]. So tattoos become ways of building an identity which is different in a social context. But we find a paradox between the highly theoretical focus on diversity and uniformity in the tattoo design. Personalization is the key and this will often help in achieving personal expression. This tension shows the importance of the design, not just the result, in the essence of tattooing as a practice for constructing an identity.

2.2. *Tattoos as Processes of Transformation, Healing, and Embodiment*

The psychological aspects of tattooing have been studied, not only in relation to the development of identity, but as a way of transforming psychological identities. Research in art therapy and

transpersonal psychology has shown that tattoos can help a person process emotion, externalize inner emotions, and rewrite themselves [3; 6].

Tattoo work in the sense of healing is both symbolic and embodied. In such inquiries, the transformative dimension of tattoos is most highlighted when exploring resilience or life transitions. Pankiv-Greene claims that tattoos symbolize transformation in particular, as they indicate the start of a new way of living and emotional state [15]. McCandlish and Pearson also draw a clear connection between tattoos and mental health; they note in their work that tattoos often act as symbols of coping, recovery, or self-affirmation [11].

Anthropological views also support the same idea, which trace tattooing to deep cultural roots of cultural traditions as a way of marking transformation and a sign of belonging to a community [7; 10]. Throughout history, tattooing has been a form of self-expression for many cultures, as a mark of spirituality, social identity, or rites of passage. These core functions are still performed by modernized, but still-based traditions. The applications are more modern and more individualized.

The discourse is centered on embodiment. Tattoos are part of the body, but also part of the medium and context. Tattooing produces “embodied spaces” where identity, perception, and physical experience intersect [17].

Thus, the power of a tattoo is not a question of its symbolic significance alone, but of its relation to the shape and motion of the body. However, while much of the literature focuses on the psychological and cultural dimensions of embodiment, much of the literature ignores the technical and artistic processes of embodiment.

Very little attention has been paid to the impact of anatomy’s design adaptation on tattoo perception and experience in particular. This is especially true of botanical tattoos, where organic forms need to interact harmoniously with the structure of the body to achieve the desired effect.

2.3. Cultural Normalization, Individualization, and the Gap in Design Methodology

Tattooing has become much more culturally accepted in the last few decades, providing a way of self-expression that is increasingly understood across all demographics. Over the past two decades, tattoos have become more and more popular, according to research. As a result, there has been a substantial change in social perception and cultural acceptance, especially among younger generations [14]. This normalization is taking place with a growing variety of styles and meanings of tattoos. Tattooing is based on a very good variety of cultural, social, and also individual factors in its various aspects.

According to Clemmensen et al. tattooing is a cultural phenomenon rather than a genetic one, the latter emphasizing the importance of the environment and social norms [4]. Similarly, Owens et al. argue against prior psychological models that have stigmatized tattooing, noting that tattooing is a cultural and expressive practice that warrants a nuanced understanding [13]. In contrast, large-scale studies provide relationships between tattooing and behavioral or demographic characteristics, such as behavioral risk tolerance and personality traits [8; 12].

But these findings do not discount tattooing as an active and intentional act. Rather, they emphasize the multiple dimensions of tattooing as an interaction between multiple dimensions of human behavior. One of the disturbing results of this body of research is the increasing reliance on standard tattoo designs. The availability of tattoo imagery has proliferated with the rise of digital platforms, leading to increased access and copying of the design, often the design being copied unmodified physically to different bodies. These practices could also work against the fundamental work of tattooing as an identity-based act of expression and meaning-making.

The focus on individual approaches also brings in ethical issues. According to Solano-Ruiz et al. body transformation is not “something that happens randomly” and should respect personal autonomy and identity to create an embodiment of self-determination; therefore, tattooing should facilitate choices in their own making and intentionality [18]. This is further grounded in larger theories of motivation and self-determination which posit that autonomy is necessary in order to achieve life-producing and sustainable behaviour [19].

There is a considerable amount of literature on tattooing in terms of the psychological, cultural and behavioural dimensions, but a gap remains in terms of how psychological, cultural and behavioural aspects can be integrated in their design methodology. In particular, there is a lack of investigation into which aspects of artistic processes can make concepts such as individuality, embodiment and meaning-making concrete in the form of an artistic product.

The shortage is most acute with botanical tattoos. Botanical imagery abounds, with its rich symbolism and visual style, but is very much dependent on its embodiment and form in the body. Organic forms must be very conscious of flow, proportion and alignment for visual coherency and depth of symbolism. Hence, as noted above, there is a clear need for theoretical insight bridge frameworks for practical application. This gap will help research to better account for aesthetic and psychological effects of tattoo design.

3. Problem Statement

The present study aims to fill the gap mentioned by this approach and aims at introducing an applied approach for botanical tattooing integrating the anatomical, artistic and symbolic aspects of the technique.

4. Methods and Materials

The present study employs a qualitative, practice-oriented analytical approach synthesizing cross-disciplinary literature and applied artistic framework analysis. It is also interpretive, seeking to bridge a theoretical conceptualisation of tattooing (identity, embodiment and meaning-making) with the applied practice of tattoo design. The main methodological contribution is the use of the Hlynska Tattoo Method, designed by Olga Hlynska, as both an analytical lens and an applied design framework. We have developed our approach as a structured, multi-layered framework that consists of three interrelated dimensions, namely (1) anatomical adaptation, (2) compositional integration, and (3) symbolic personalization (See Figure 1).

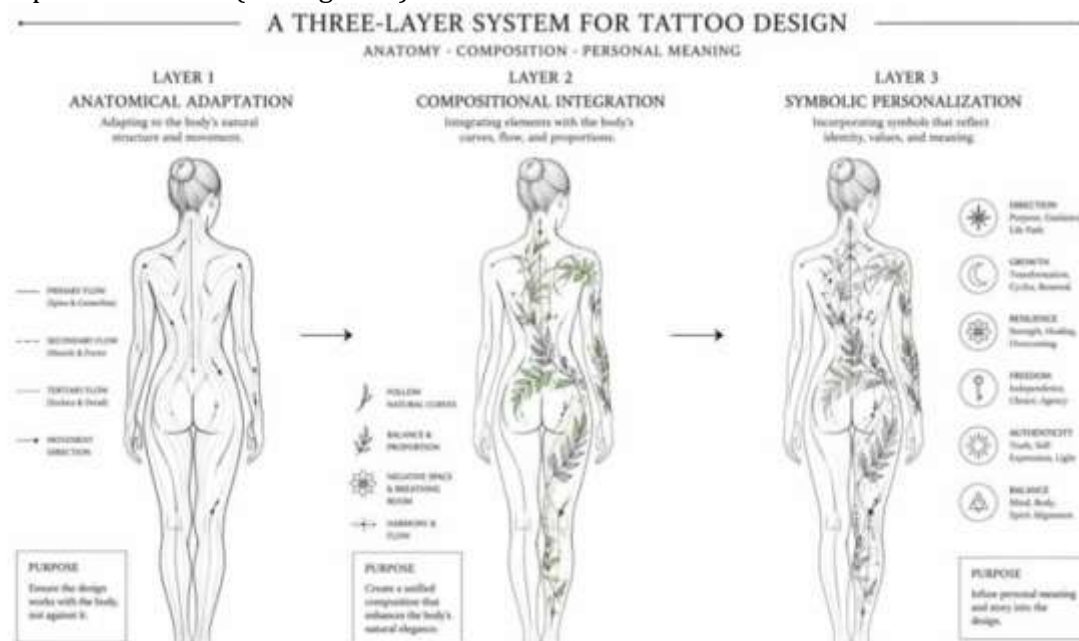


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Hlynska Tattoo Method

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 1. Core Components of the Hlynska Tattoo Method

Component	Definition	Practical Application	Outcome
Anatomical Adaptation	Mapping body structure and movement	Aligning design with muscles, curves, and flow	Visual harmony with the body
Compositional Integration	Structuring design elements spatially	Transforming botanical forms into flowing compositions	Dynamic, non-static appearance
Symbolic Personalization	Embedding individual meaning	Collaborative design based on personal narrative	Deep psychological resonance

Source: Compiled by the author.

Anatomical adaptation is a systematic mapping of the body's morphology: curvature, muscle flow, movement dynamics. Now, the human body becomes an active, not passive, compositional framework, allowing design of elements to encourage visual coherence as well as lasting stability of the tattoo.

Second, compositional integration takes up space in terms of the botanical transformed into the dynamic visual structure in accordance with anatomical directionality. Botanical shapes (stems, leaves, flowers) are reinterpreted to echo natural body lines to create a continuity between the tattoo and the physical form. It does not repeat standard patterns, but rather moves with fluidity and spatial harmony.

Thirdly, symbolic personalisation is achieved through a cooperative design involving clients and partners. A tattoo idea, including personal experiences, emotional stories as well as personal meanings, corresponds to existing theories of identity construction and meaning-making [5; 9].

The analytical method thus consists of the combination of theoretical approaches from the literature review with practice-based observations derived from this approach as it is applied in a professional tattooing setting (See Table 1). The study adopts a qualitative analytical assessment of standardized versus individualized tattoo processes rather than a quantitative measure.

5. Results

Data collected through analysis show systematic differences between standardized (“copy-paste”) tattoo practices and individualized botanical tattoo design, suggesting that design methodology is a major player in shaping aesthetic and psychological outcomes (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. Anatomical Tattoo Design

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 2. Standardized vs Individualized Tattoo Design

Criterion	Standardized (Copy-Paste) Design	Individualized (Hlynska Method) Design
Design Origin	Pre-existing template	Created specifically for the client
Anatomical Adaptation	None or minimal	Fully adapted to body structure
Visual Integration	Often misaligned with body	Flows with anatomical lines
Aesthetic Outcome	Static, flat appearance	Dynamic, “living” composition
Symbolic Meaning	Generic or externally assigned	Personally constructed
Client Involvement	Low	High (collaborative process)
Longevity of Design	May distort visually over time	Maintains coherence over time
Emotional Connection	Limited	Strong personal attachment
Artistic Complexity	Simplified replication	High-level composition strategy

Source: Compiled by the author.

The study is about anatomical alignment and is considered a major factor for visual coherence. It has generally been demonstrated that standardized designs are mostly applied without adaptation to the morphology of the body, leading to compositions that appear visually disconnected or distorted over time (see Table 2). In individual designs created through anatomical mapping, this is by definition more in line with the structure of the body, which results in a more harmonious integration between the tattoo and the body. This resonates with the notion of the body as an active compositional framework rather than a passive surface [17].

A key difference is also in the experience of it – the perceived sense of vitality, vigour and playfulness. Botanical designs are custom and have a sense of movement and organic development, while standardized tattoos look more static and flatter. In botanical compositions, this contrast is particularly significant in this manner, and even stem, leaf and floral patterns might be adapted to the flow of anatomy. The fusion is intended to create a so-called living art effect, where the use of tattoos is in theory a dynamic process of identity/transformation [15].

The third main result deals with the symbolic depth and psychological involvement. As Table 1 shows, standardized tattoos are frequently presumed to be of external origin or semantically generic, thus limiting personal meaning. Conversely, individualized designs connect to the narratives of the clients through collaborative processes, leading to a higher level of emotional connection and identity connection. These findings are consistent with the literature on tattoos as a way of meaning-making and self-expression [9; 11].

Furthermore, the comparison in Table 2 indicates that client engagement is one of the key mediators. Low involvement with standard approaches diminishes the sense of ownership over the tattoo, while high involvement with custom design increases satisfaction and longer-term attachment.

This is consistent with broader paradigms of autonomy and self-determination in behavior [19]. Finally, we show that the methodology used is directly related to the design lifetime. Standardized tattoos are at higher risk of visual deterioration due to their poor anatomical fit, whereas custom designs tend to remain structurally coherent over time.

This implies a link between anatomical, compositional, and symbolic dimensions at the individual level. In summary, these differences are summarized in Table 2, to which the central argument as stated: Botanical tattoos are most aesthetically and psychologically satisfying when they are designed as customized, body-specific designs.

6. Discussion

From a broader perspective, the results of this work strongly support the main argument of this manuscript that individualized tattoo design is intrinsically superior to copy-based methods, because it integrates anatomical, psychological, and symbolic properties into a visual system. Tattooing has been studied previously as a form of identity expression and meaning-making [1; 16]. This paper adds to that knowledge by arguing that the design process itself affects the possibility of fulfilling these functions or not.

This research contributes significantly to a reconceptualization of the body as the active compositional agent of the body itself. The body is described in the current literature as a nexus of meaning and identity [17]. The role of physical structure in the design process has, however, been neglected. Copy-based tattooing essentially disregards this element and reduces the body to a neutral work area where images can be projected. This generates visual dissonance where designs are not congruent to anatomical flow and thus are susceptible to distortion in perception and reduction in aesthetic coherence over time.

On the other hand, personalized design such as Olga Hlynska's Hlynska Tattoo Method for tattooing the body allows the body to be the structural basis for creative construction. The design becomes associated with the rest of the body, instead of being imposed upon it, as the botanical forms are manipulated by muscle direction, curvature, movement and expression. This integration produces what might be called embodied visual harmony, where the tattoo appears as a natural part of the body and dynamically responds to the body's form.

The advantages of personalized design are getting more and more obvious, for its ability to generate the "living art" effect, a sense of vigor that this study is looking for. Botanical tattoos that don't take anatomy into account tend to be pretty static and decorative. But if it is altered or designed into the contours of the body, following the natural path of the body, it gives the appearance of natural growth

and movement. This is also in line with theoretical approaches considering tattoos as dynamic processes rather than permanent entities [15].

Importantly, this effect is not limited to botanical styles. Botanical tattoos are more illustrative because of their organic structure. The rule – that design needs to act on the body to be charged—holds for different kinds of tattoos. A second key pillar of superiority is symbolic depth and psychological engagement. Tattoos have been considered constructions of identity and expression of emotion [5; 9]. But the results indicate that copy-based designs dramatically reduce the power.

Such designs can be somewhat stereotyped (or have general or extrinsic meanings), which reduces their appropriateness for the individual depending on external sources. This diminishes the role of the tattoo as a medium of personal narrative and identity development. It allows the user to insert his or her personal history, emotional environment, and subjective meaning into the tattoo. The process transforms the tattoo from an aesthetic object into a custom-made symbolic network to psychologically reinforce the symbolism of this system. The effect is also enhanced by the collaborative nature of custom design, as clients are involved in making decisions in the result.

This is also consistent with a self-determination perspective that supports the existence of autonomy and individual agency in actual engagement [19]. The dialogue also demonstrates a disjuncture in the structural contradiction of contemporary tattoo culture. The desire for uniqueness has long been described as a central motivator of tattooing [20], but the ubiquity of digital tattoo representations has led to an increase in replicativity. This creates a paradox in which people seek personal expression, which is by its nature limiting for individuals.

The results suggest that in order to solve this contradiction, tattoo design should be approached as a process-driven design strategy, rather than a product by design. Individualized design has clear advantages in terms of long-term visual stability and aesthetics, from an aesthetic view. Tattoos that are not adapted to their context are more likely to become distorted as they morph and age. Anatomically based designs will maintain structure and cohesiveness as time goes on.

However, one needs to shift the focus further to the consideration of the temporal aspect of doing this – as tattooing is a permanent body modification – in trying not only to deliver an immediate aesthetic effect. The findings ethically reinforce the argument that tattooing should serve the individuality and independence of the individual tattooing client. As Solano-Ruiz et al. have pointed out, the practice of body transformation has important personal and psychological implications that require a mindful and client-centered approach [18].

Copy-based tattooing may not be able to achieve this ethical standard because it reduces personalization. Individualized tattoo design is consistent with the principles of self-identity and self-expression. For example, using botanical tattoos as a case study provides insight into the wider applicability of the results. Botanical designs are a good example to study because of their organic properties, but the principles we have found in this study, such as anatomical adaptation, compositional integration, and symbolic personalization, are more relevant for tattoo design in general.

This moves the emphasis away from individual fashion as a stylistic choice to a foundational principle for effective tattooing. In conclusion, this discussion affirms that the benefits of personalized tattoo design are multifaceted, including aesthetic, psychological and ethical factors. In this way, tattooing becomes an integral part of a person's identity, not only of art but of being a human being, merging the individual's body, identity and personal history.

7. Conclusions

In addition to aesthetically pleasing body embellishments, botanical tattoos are integrated representations of identity, embodiment, and personal meaning when approached through personalized design methods, as this study has shown. Utilizing interdisciplinary literature and the applied framework of the Hlynska Tattoo Method, this research addresses the shortcomings of standardized “copy-paste” tattoo practices and the importance of anatomical and symbolic adaptation.

The results demonstrate that tattoos become more visually cohesive and psychologically resonant when the design is in keeping with the body's natural structure and the individual's own life narrative. Botanical parts in particular have a much higher expressive potential if they are approached as dynamic pieces that develop along anatomical lines, which reinforces the concept of tattoos as “living art.”

Additionally, this study adds to the literature by overcoming a striking disconnect between the theoretical landscape of tattoo-making and practical design methodologies. This allows the Hlynska

Tattoo Method, which is structured as an implementation plan, to provide a replicable model for improving aesthetic and user experience by integrating the artistic, anatomical, and psychological aspects of the tattoo. At its core, this paper recontextualizes botanical tattooing as an interdisciplinary undertaking that is connected with the concept of art and self-image. Through embodiment, it provides support for the individuality of human beings as necessary to design meaningful tattoos.

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