

THE *Current*

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

New Book by UCSB Art Professor Examines Tattoos and Their Stories

Once an art form restricted to sailors, soldiers, and people on the fringe of society, tattooing has become a cultural phenomenon. More than 45 million people in the United States have tattoos, many of them using the indelible images as a means of sharing their own personal messages. In his new book, "Permanence: Tattoo Portraits" (Chronicle Books, 2008), Kip Fulbeck, a professor of art at the University of California, Santa Barbara, combines photographic tattoo portraits with stories about these images told in the subjects' own words and handwriting.

"It's a book about identity that uses tattoos as the starting point," said Fulbeck. "I'm most interested in how people choose to individualize themselves--in this case, in a physical sense. I'm interested in hearing their response to the question, 'Why?' so I picked people with interesting stories rather than interesting tattoos--though sometimes people have both--and I wanted to be as varied and diverse as possible."

The collection of portraits includes rock stars, concentration camp survivors, corporate executives, students, suburban mothers, Hells Angels, gang members, adult film stars, veterans, and celebrities. Also included is Milton Love, a research biologist at UCSB's Marine Science Institute and an expert on rockfish, who claims "only real marine biologists have tattoos."

"The most powerful experience for me was photographing a New York firefighter," said Fulbeck. "He was in the Twin Towers on 9/11 and lost several members of his

battalion. Even though I was prepared, when he took off his shirt I got choked up. His back piece is the burning Twin Towers with angels carrying a banner that reads 'All Gave Some, Some Gave All' and a list of his crew's names."

Heavily tattooed himself, Fulbeck does not necessarily consider himself a fan of body art, but he appreciates great artistry and the talent some tattooers have to create brilliant images. The book includes work by Horiyoshi III, the most famous living Japanese tattoo master; Horitaka, director of the San Jose Tattoo Convention and a senior apprentice of Horiyoshi III; and many other world renown tattooers, including Horitomo, Horiyuki, Lyle Tuttle, and Don Ed Hardy.

Among the celebrities featured in the book are musicians Scott Ian of Anthrax); Paul Stanley of KISS; Joan Jett of Joan Jett & the Blackhearts; Scott Weiland of Stone Temple Pilots and Velvet Revolver; and Slash of Guns N' Roses and Velvet Revolver. Other celebrities include comedian Margaret Cho; adult film star and UCSB alumna Tera Patrick; and tattooers Kat Von D and Chris Garver, who appear on The Learning Channel's "LA Ink" and Miami Ink."

Fulbeck, who received his master of fine arts degree from the UC San Diego, specializes in personal narrative, identity exploration, and pop-culture analysis. He has performed and exhibited in over 20 countries and throughout the United States, including the Whitney Museum of American Art's Biennial, Singapore International Film Festival, Bonn Videonale, and Japanese American National Museum and National Conference On Race in Higher Education. He has also been featured on CNN, MTV, and PBS. In addition to the art department, he is an affiliate faculty member in Asian American studies and film and media studies departments at UCSB, and the author of several books, including "Part Asian, 100% Hapa" (Chronicle Books, 2006), and "Paper Bullets: A Fictional Autobiography" (University of Washington Press, 2001). He has directed a dozen short films, including "Banana Split" and "Lilo & Me."

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