

BODY ROCK

By Perry Brothers, *The Kentucky Kernel*, U. of Kentucky

Brand it, pierce it, scar it, ink it.

Throw out the clay. Ditch the canvas. There's a new medium in the art world: flesh.

Any place, any time and in almost any city in America, body artists are prepared to satisfy your every craving for body adornment. They will stab you with needles, burn you with irons and cut you with knives. They will do this on purpose, and they will get paid for it. God bless America.

[What the hell is this, Perry? Some kind of sick joke? No one's ever going to believe this.]

Body Modifications, a shop near the U. of San Francisco campus, offers its patrons two of the more extreme (and we mean extreme) forms of body art: scarification and branding. San Jose State U. student Melisa Kaye works in the shop as a "scarification technician."

"Certain people are attracted to certain ways of modifying the body, but they consider needles and burning too horrible, so they choose scarification," Kaye says. Scarification, she claims, is often less painful than piercing or branding.

Most clients come to Kaye with a design. Kaye cleans the skin, applies a surface sketch of the design, then cuts the

design into the skin with a scalpel. If the person's skin doesn't scar easily, she rubs ink or ash into the incisions to increase the visibility of the resulting scar.

[This is done on purpose? This godless culture.]

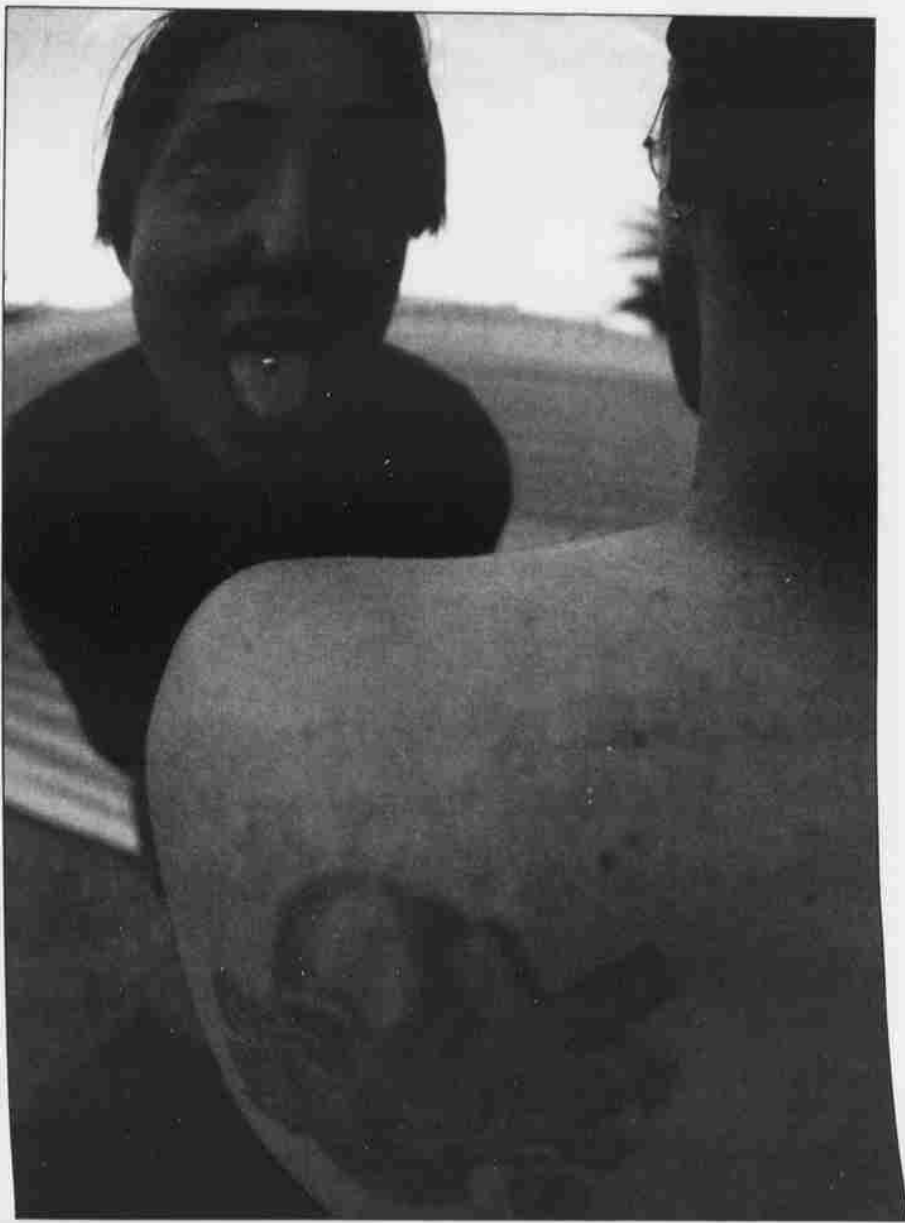
The procedure for branding is similar, but instead of a scalpel, branders like Vaughn (just Vaughn), who also works at Body Modifications, use tiny irons to make burning strikes rather than incisions. Each searing strike lasts about four seconds and causes a third-degree burn. A series of these strikes creates the desired design.

Vaughn says branding isn't very popular because most people are uncomfortable with the idea of burning their skin. But several college fraternities and sororities practice branding.

On the U. of Kentucky campus, several members of Phi Beta Sigma, a traditionally black fraternity, have received brands as a way of displaying allegiance to their fraternity. Michael Jones, a Phi Beta Sigma member, placed his left bicep under the iron in 1992.

"Branding is not a new concept," he says. "A lot of people who don't understand what it's about relate it to slavery, but it goes back even further than that. African tribes used branding and other forms of scarification in their ancient rites-of-passage ceremonies."

Kaye and Vaughn agree there's a



symbolic meaning behind body art. "As our society gets more and more technologically advanced, any form of body manipulation puts a person back in control of their own body," Kaye says, "whether you're a tribe member in New Guinea or a college student in California."

People who can't stomach cutting or burning their flesh turn to more common forms of body art. Tom Blackman, owner of Choice Peach Tattoos in Chapel Hill, N.C., says the mainstream world is opening up to making "powerful personal statements" through other forms of body modification, such as body piercing.

Nearly any part of the body can be—and by brave souls is—pierced.

Brian DiCrocco, a psychology student at Ohio State U., had his tongue pierced by "pierceologist" Patrick McCarthy. "I'd always wanted my septum pierced," DiCrocco says. "But I figured I'd start out with the tongue and then eventually get my septum done."

McCarthy says many of his clients request additional piercing after they discover the surprisingly low level of pain involved—even with genital piercings. Most of his clients enjoy a sense of empowerment from the act, he says.

[Empowerment from jabbing a needle in your crotch?]

Of course there's always that old standby—the tattoo. Available most anywhere—from the harbor docks to the Cracker Jack box—tattoos are the

original form of body modification. Except for circumcision, of course.

Believed to be of Sumerian origin, the practice of tattooing involves the pricking and staining of the skin with indelible ink. Although tattoos can often be removed with lasers or bleaching techniques, they're more or less a permanent commitment.

As such, many people choose to get tattoos in inconspicuous places—on the ankle or below the belt line—ensuring that only a select few will have the privilege of viewing. Others choose to tattoo their foreheads, but these people are often drunk and/or Charles Manson.

Thinking about piercing your belly button or frying your shoulder with a fraternity symbol? A word of advice: Don't try this at home. These procedures leave open wounds, which could lead to potential dangers—infection, unintentionally torn skin, even possible exposure to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Most studios set their sterilization standards at hospital levels, but be safe and inquire about the instrument cleaning procedures prior to going under the knife, needle or iron.

Go on now. Express yourself, if you've got the ... uh ... skin.

[Look, Perry, these people are sick. There's no way we can publish this. Our readers don't want to bear about cutting and piercing. They want to know about hip young bands like Kenny G. and those Rolling Stoners. Thanks, but no thanks.]

Photography by: Cliff Jette, Arizona Wildcat, U. of Arizona



Two new recruits at the navel academy.