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The Cowboy Gets Inked with Tattooing Exhibition

New exhibition explores the history of tattooing in North America

OKLAHOMA CITY – Dark parlors, loud music and buzzing needles may come to mind when you think “tattooing,” but The Cowboy’s newest exhibition pushes past the tattooing stereotype to highlight the long-standing traditions of tattooing in North America.

Tattoos: Religion, Reality and Regret, opening August 27, 2021, at The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, explores the cultural traditions of tattooing in Native American cultures and tattooing traditions that are practiced globally today.

“Tattooing is a form of expression often undervalued in historical research,” said Dr. Eric Singleton, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Curator of Ethnology.

“Tattoos were used to express tribal affiliation and war honors, connections to divine beings, maturity rites, and social or religious affiliation so meaningful to some cultures that they could carry on with a person into the afterlife.”

Now a part of modern, main-stream culture, this exhibition aims to highlight the history, legacy and traditions of Native American tattooing and the modern meanings and customs of tattooing through items and images from the Museum’s permanent collections and the Dickinson Research Center.

“Our mission is to explore the evolving history of the American West and this exhibition cuts to the core of that idea,” said Natalie Shirley, Museum President & CEO. “The West is more than just a saddle or a story about a cowboy, it’s many things to many people and in this exhibition, we get to explore what tattooing means to our shared history.”

For up-to-date information on the exhibition and associated programming and events, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.

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About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

Nationally accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum is located only six miles northeast of downtown Oklahoma City in the Adventure District at the junction of Interstates 44 and 35, the state's exciting Adventure Road corridor. The Museum offers annual memberships beginning at just \$40. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org. For high-resolution images related to the National Cowboy Museum, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org/media-pics/.