



**The Body as a canvas:**

**A non-permanent form of body art inspired by body adornment practices.**

**By Tienielle Connor**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree**

**Baccalaureus Technologiae: Surface Design**

**In the Faculty of Informatics and Design**

**at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

**Supervisor: Avryl Dahl**

**Co-Supervisor: Alettia Chisin**

**Cape Town**

**October 2010**

# **The Proposal**

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**Tenielle Connor BTech (Surface Design)**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Baccalaureus Technologiae in Surface Design,  
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March 2010

**Supervisor: Avryl Dahl**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **Statement of Research Problem:**

Forms of body adornment/modification and scarification practices have been around for many years. These conventions say strong things about the values of any given society - urban as well as tribal. Many forms of body adornment/modification have evolved overtime and still exist within our mainstream society today, however the true traditional meanings behind body adornment have in many ways been forgotten. My aim is to create art that will be influenced by the three-dimensional aspect of African scarification as well as the non-permanent two-dimensional feature of tribal body painting. This will be effected in a way that will determine the link between representation and body adornment. By using the body as a canvas, I will examine whether different traditional practices can serve as legitimate inspiration for expressive conceptual representation in our contemporary society in which sub-cultures abound.

### **Background to the Research Problem/Context:**

The human body is bland and boring. The diversity and inventiveness as well as the daring and different methods that humans have devised over the years for altering their appearance is truly astounding – from simple acts such as placing flowers in the hair to the complex covering of the body in intricate scarification designs. Such techniques form a huge body of human knowledge and innovation. Having become familiar with different techniques of adorning the body within my sub-culture, and discovering that the various reasons and meanings for practicing these techniques are rapidly diminishing, I hope to portray body art in a way that generates a deeper understanding and awareness of body adornment and exactly what it represents.

## **Clarification of Basic Terms and Concepts:**

Body adornment: Something that beautifies or adorns the body (Farlex, 2010).

Representation: A presentation to the mind in the form of an idea or image (Farlex, 2010).

Scarification: To create a design on (the skin) by means of shallow cuts that are sometimes rubbed with a colorant or irritant to enhance the resulting scar tissue (Farlex, 2010).

Culture: *The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought* (Farlex, 2010).

Tradition: A mode of thought or behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation; a custom or usage (Farlex, 2010).

## **Objectives of the Research:**

By linking meaning into my practical pieces, as well as using non-permanent elements and materials from my own natural environment in the same way as these tribes do, my aim is to generate body art that will reflect a deeper understanding and awareness of body adornment. I wish to show exactly what it represents as well as portraying - in a conceptual framework - a life cycle that comments on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western. I wish to comment on how Western lifestyle is diluting our social being with trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

## **Research Question:**

How can traditional forms of body adornment and scarification serve as inspiration for current sub-cultural forms of conceptual expressive representation?

## **Sub-questions:**

1. What is the signification of different body adornment and modification in traditional cultures?
2. What do esoteric social traditional symbols in body adornment and modification represent in a Western culture?
3. How can sub-cultural representation be applied to the body using non-permanent materials, as a contemporary form of expression?

## 1. Literature Overview

### Theoretical Underpinning:

#### Theory of Representation:

I will be using the book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* by Stuart Hall as my main reference, as well as investigating Michael Foucault's theory of representation. A brief definition of Representation: a presentation to the mind in the form of an idea or image (Farlex. 2010). For Foucault, representation was not just one of many modern philosophical problems but distinctively seen as the heart of the question of knowledge (Gutting, 2008).

The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture.

"Language is able to sustain a dialogue between participants, which enables them to build up a culture of shared understandings and interpret the world in roughly the same ways. Language is able to do this as it operates as a representational system. In language we use signs and symbols, these can be written words, musical notes or even objects to stand for or to represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings." (Hall, 1997: 1).

Foucault argued that it is not the subject that produces knowledge, but rather the discourse (Hall, 1997: 55). The subject never stands as an individual or the source and author of knowledge and power. The subject is placed within the discourse and it is the discourse that produces knowledge (Hall, 1997: 55).

As Hall points out, it is important to remember that Foucault offers a very different definition of discourse, in the sense that Foucault's definition is as much about ways of thinking and practices as it is about language (Gutting, 2008).



According to Foucault, meaning and therefore meaningful action are only made meaningful within the essential abstract space of a discourse. It is then that discourse distinguishes framed ways of thinking about certain topics, things and objects (Gutting, 2008).

“It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them- how we represent them- that we give them meaning. Culture is involved in all those practices that are not simply genetically programmed into us, but which carry meaning and value for us, which we need to be meaningfully interpreted by others. It is what distinguishes the ‘human’ element in social life from what is simply biologically driven. Its study underlines the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life. ” (Hall, 1997: 4).

Representation therefore connects meaning and language to culture. This meaning can be seen in many different art forms, specifically in body adornment. By focusing on the Theory of Representation behind culture, I will look at the subject of body adornment and modification (body painting and scarification) as methods of expression within this theoretical framework. This will be done in order to determine the signification of different types of body adornment and modification in traditional cultures.

## **2. Methodology**

### **Approach:**

The process for this project will be subjective. I plan to use Northern African body-painting and scarification as my inspiration for creating a contemporary non-permanent form of conceptual expression.

My work will consist of body art as a personal statement that will also incorporate influences of past traditions. I will use certain areas of the body which in turn can create their own meanings and become symbolic elements. The non-permanent, organic and two-dimensional aspect of my work will be inspired purely by African body painting as this contrasts strongly with scarification and will add another form of meaning while bringing significantly different characteristics to my work.

The body adornment movement, specifically African Scarification, will inspire the three-dimensional element of the design, as their scarification is both decorative and innovative, and the scars create a completely different consistency to that seen in our contemporary Western culture.

All of this will be effected in such a manner as to create my own form of contemporary non-permanent body art; body art that portrays in a conceptual framework a life cycle commenting on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western. I will also portray how Western lifestyle is diluting our social being with trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

### **Data Collection:**

I will derive my practical inspiration by focusing on the three-dimensional forms of scarification and non-permanent adornment. By researching the body adornment practices of several African tribes in-depth, I will compare my findings with South African Western culture and the way in which they adorn their bodies. In this manner, I intend to discover the meaning behind ancient cultural body adornments ie: what they represent and to whom. Thereafter I will also conduct informal interviews with people who have in some way or form adorned their bodies in a sub-cultural context. The South Africa tattoo and piercing culture has made major inroads into mainstream society and – through my interviews – I will question both traditional and contemporary forms of adornment, taking great care in evaluating the meaning behind both traditional and modern body adornments.

I then plan to visit fellow students at the City Varsity's Motion Picture Make-up and Special Effects Department to learn different techniques of painting and decorating the body. The City Varsity has an extensive department focusing on make-up as an art.

### **Data Analysis:**

Having dabbled in the field of make-up and special effects, as well as being a Surface Designer, I would like to re-interpret the word 'surface' by using one's body as a canvas. Design is my conceptual tool and will remain that whilst producing my works of body art.

Using all non-permanent mediums such as paint, sand, sticks, beads, wire, seeds, charcoal, feathers, transfers, foils, stickers and fabrics, I want to create works of art on different parts of the female body that represent and symbolize different meanings. I intend to work only with women, as I relate best with women in the decorative arena of body adornment. I will experiment with different textures and three-dimensional forms that I will attach to the body. My colour palette will reflect

that of the emotion and symbolic meaning that each work will represent. I want to create decorative body art that resembles the innovative and symbolic meanings of African scarification, while at the same time using non-permanent elements and materials from my own natural environment, in a similar way as these tribes do. My aim is to generate body art in a conceptual framework - a life cycle that comments on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western, while examining how western lifestyle is diluting our social being.

### **3. Delineation of Research**

Using my own interpretation of body expression and representation, I will create conceptual art with unique forms of body adornment. I will put together a portfolio of at least ten different photographs and videos documenting the process and completion of adorning ten different female bodies. These works of art will be traditionally inspired, non-permanent three-dimensional body art that will also undoubtedly represent self-expression and comment on 'trendy' sub-cultural society. Focusing on certain areas of the body, I will be inspired by the meanings that these various painted areas reflect. As I document my progress and work, I would like to reveal not only the adaption of body adornment through time, but also why the body is adorned in these particular ways.

### **5. Significance of Research**

Traditional practices such as African body adornment/scarification have been significantly recorded. However, looking at the way these traditional usages have

been combined with contemporary personal expression, will allow me to evaluate the gradual conceptual evolution of these traditions.

## **6. Expected Outcomes, Results and Contributions of the Research**

By creating a link between traditional practices of African body adornment/scarification and connecting these with body expression and representation within my own sub-cultural context, I hope to create awareness of body adornment throughout time. I would like to share the value of representation with the viewer – as representation has played, and continues to play, such an important role within the social aspect of mankind.

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## **8. Summary/Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to determine the link between representation and body adornment by using the body as a canvas. I will investigate whether different traditional practices can serve as legitimate inspiration for expressive representation in a contemporary sub-cultural context.



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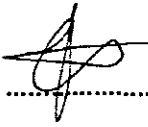
**October 2010**



# The Thesis

## Declaration

I, Tenielle Connor, declare that the contents of this thesis/ dissertation represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis/ dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Futhermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.



.....

Signature

22/10/2010  
.....

Date

## ABSTRACT

Forms of body adornment and scarification practices have been around since the origin of mankind. Many forms of traditional body adornment have evolved overtime and still exist within our mainstream society today, however examples of recent body adornments, show that although still very much in practice, in many cases the meaning has been lost. The motivational routes of western adornments are today based on what looks good as apposed to a ritual or right of passage that marks one's body for life.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to share the value of representation with the viewer – as representation has played, and continues to play, such an important role within the social aspect of mankind. By creating a link between traditional practices of African body adornment/ scarification and connecting these with body expression and representation within my own sub-cultural context, I hope to create awareness of body adornment throughout time.

Finally the practical component of this research will consist of a portfolio of different photographs and videos documenting the process and completion of adorning different female bodies. These works of art will be traditionally inspired, non-permanent three-dimensional body art that will also undoubtedly represent self-expression and comment on 'trendy' sub-cultural society. As I document my progress and work it is hoped that I portray in a conceptual framework, a life cycle that comments on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western, and how Western lifestyle is diluting our social being with trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

## **Acknowledgements**

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- My parents, family and friends for their emotional and financial support;
- My photographer Luke mc Donald;
- My models Marian Cuff and Leigh Lambrechts for their unbelievable patience;
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to determine the link between representation and body adornment. By using the body as a canvas, I will examine whether different traditional practices serve as legitimate inspiration for expressive conceptual representation in our contemporary society in which sub-cultures abound. Forms of body adornment/modification and scarification practices have been around since the origin of mankind. Many forms of body adornment/modification, such as body painting, tattooing and scarring, have evolved overtime and still exist within our mainstream society today. However, the original traditional meanings behind body adornment have in many ways been forgotten.

In my opinion the human body is bland and boring. The diversity and inventiveness, as well as the daring and different methods that humans have devised over the years for altering their appearance, is truly astounding – from simple acts such as placing flowers in the hair to the complex covering of the body in intricate scarification designs. Such techniques form a huge body of human knowledge and innovation that has served a range of different purposes. Having become familiar with different techniques of adorning the body, and having learnt that the various reasons and meanings for practicing these techniques have little or no association with the original meaning of past practices, I hope to portray body art in a way that generates a deeper understanding and awareness of body adornment and exactly what it represents. This will be done within a conceptual framework portraying the evolution from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western.

The theoretical framework of my research will be outlined in Chapter Two. The theory of representation by Michael Foucault and Stuart Hall will serve as a main reference. I shall uncover how specific symbols and elements can represent

important meaning (Hall, 1997). Here I will unpack the theory of representation and how it plays such a significant part of our day-to-day lives.

The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. In language we use signs and symbols; these can be written words, musical notes or even objects that are used to represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings (Hall, 1997: 1).

“It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them- how we represent them- that we give them meaning. Culture is involved in all those practices that are not simply genetically programmed into us, but which carry meaning and value for us, which we need to be meaningfully interpreted by others. It is what distinguishes the ‘human’ element in social life from what is simply biologically driven. Its study underlines the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life.” (Hall, 1997: 4).

Representation therefore connects meaning and language to culture. This meaning can be seen in many different art forms – and specifically in body adornment which is the focus of my investigation. By examining the theory of representation behind culture, I will investigate to what extent traditional cultures have influenced forms of body adornment and representational methods of expression. I will gain an understanding of what they represent and whether the Western culture of contemporary South Africa has diluted these forms of expression.

In Chapter Three, this methodology will determine the significance of representation within body adornment/modification. By focusing on the three-dimensional forms of scarification and non-permanent adornment, I will draw practical inspiration by researching several African tribes in depth, and then using this information to make comparisons with the effect that South Africa’s Western culture has had on local cultures and the way in which they adorn their bodies. Thereafter I will also conduct informal interviews with people in my South African sub-cultural environment who have in some way or form adorned their bodies. I will question both traditional and

contemporary forms of adornment, taking great care to evaluate the meaning behind each form of adornment.

As I successfully studied courses in both Make-up and Special Effects in 2006, I plan to visit fellow students at the City Varsity motion picture Make-up Department with the express intention of learning new and different techniques of painting and decorating the body. This will prove extremely useful as they have an extensive department focusing on make-up as an art. City Varsity has become well known for skills such as painting, wrapping, and molding their human canvases.

I hope to evoke emotions through my own process and thoughts, as well as by documenting design ideas daily; through sketches, interviews and questionnaires, I will analyze the significance of the skin adorned.

My process will be expressed in the form of digitally documented conceptual art (DVD's and photographs) with the intention of showing three-dimensional and two-dimensional non-permanent symbolic elements that have been influenced by African scarification and body adornment. In doing so, my intention is to reflect through my own knowledge and life experiences, the true and actual meanings that connect past traditions and present applications of body adornment in our contemporary sub-cultural society. The practical aim of this research topic is to create ten different forms of non-permanent body adornment, and capture within them ten different symbolic meanings.

**My research question and sub-questions are as follows:**

How can traditional forms of body adornment and scarification serve as inspiration for current sub-cultural forms of conceptual expressive representation?

**Sub questions:**

1. What is the signification of different body adornment and modification in traditional cultures?
2. What do esoteric social traditional symbols in body adornment and modification represent in a western culture?
3. How can sub-cultural representation be applied to the body using non-permanent materials, as a contemporary form of expression?

## CHAPTER TWO

This chapter outlines the subject of body adornment and modification (body painting and scarification) as methods of expression within a theoretical framework, in order to determine their meaning within a particular cultural context.

By focusing on the two and three-dimensional aspects of traditional African scarification and body adornment, specifically amongst the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes, I seek to discover what esoteric social traditional symbols in body adornment and modification represent in a Western culture.

### Representation and Meaning

Representation is a presentation to the mind in the form of an idea or image (Farlex, 2010). The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture (Hall, 1997: 1).

“Language is able to sustain a dialogue between participants, which enables them to build up a culture of shared understandings and interpret the world in roughly the same ways. Language is able to do this as it operates as a representational system. In language we use signs and symbols, these can be written words, musical notes or even objects to stand for or to represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings.” (Hall, 1997: 1).

The emphasis on shared understanding within cultural practices is important. Participants in a culture convey agreed meanings with regard to people, objects and events.

“It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them (how we represent them) that we give them meaning. Culture is involved in all those practices that are not simply genetically programmed into us, but in which carry meaning and

value for us, which we need to be meaningfully interpreted by others. It is what distinguishes the 'human' element in social life from what is simply biologically driven. Its study underlines the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life. " (Hall, 1997: 4).

Michael Foucault's theory of representation argues that it is not the subject that produces knowledge, but rather the discourse (Hall, 1997: 55). The subject never stands as an individual or the source and author of knowledge and power. The subject is placed within the discourse and it is the discourse that produces knowledge (Hall, 1997: 55).

As Hall points out, it is important to remember that Foucault offers a very different definition of discourse, in the sense that Foucault's definition is as much about ways of thinking and practices as it is about language. According to Foucault, meaning – and therefore meaningful action – is only made meaningful within the essential abstract space of a discourse. It is then that the discourse distinguishes framed ways of thinking about certain topics, things and objects (Gutting, 2008).

Signs and symbols are used, which can either be hand-painted objects, material objects or images, and these are all used to represent or embody our concepts, ideas and feelings to other people (Hall, 1997: 1). For many years the extensive scarification and body adornments of young men and women throughout Northern Africa has been used extensively as forms of cultural signification. These adornments represent major transitions in life. This form of representation can be extensive and life changing, whether from simply painting the body to completely modifying it. The diversity and inventiveness, as well as the daring and different methods that these humans have devised over the years for altering their appearance, is truly astounding (Ebin, 1979: 3).

The body is a physical link between ourselves and the outside world. It is the medium through which we most directly project ourselves in social life; our use and presentation of it say precise things about the society in which we live and the

degree of our integration within that society (Ebin, 1979: 1).

Representation therefore provides meaning to culture. This meaning can be seen in many different art forms within all cultures, specifically in body adornment.

### Body Adornment as a Form of Representation

People everywhere have attempted to change their bodies in an effort to meet their cultural standards of beauty, as well as their religious and/or social obligations. Most of the time, modification or adornment of their bodies is part of the complex process of creating and re-creating personal and social identities. Body painting has been practiced since the Paleolithic as archaeological evidence indicates, and the earliest human evidence of tattooing goes back to the Neolithic with mummies found in Europe, Central Asia, the Andes and the Middle East. It is clear that adorning and modifying the body is a central human practice (Fisher, 1990: 270).

### Representation within African Scarification

In the words of Stuart Hall (1997: 25), *"Things don't mean, we construct meaning, using representational systems- concepts and signs."*

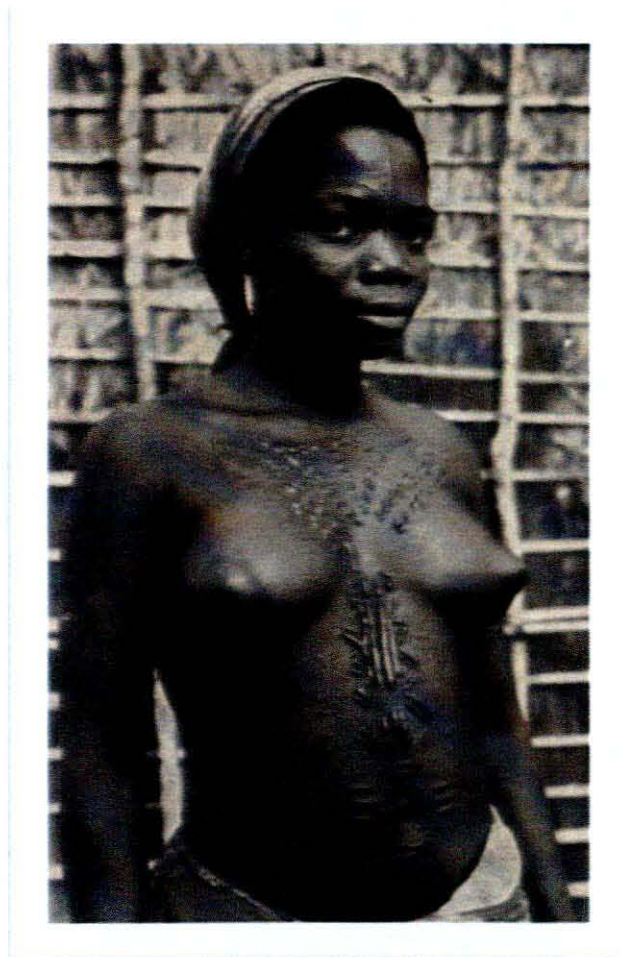
Scarification among many Northern Africa tribes is a ritualized practice, specifically among the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes of the Omo River. The Omo River, which seems a lost world enclosed by the Abyssinian mountains, Sudan's impenetrable Nile swamps and the barren lands of the Kenyan border, is home to a small number of subsistence farmers who coexist with these groups of hunter-gatherers in this isolated wilderness (Fisher, 1990: 249).

While scarring one's body may seem like a new form of body art, the practice is really quite ancient. Scarification is a tribal body art that involves purposely scarring the skin to create raised marks and/or complete patterns. Body scarification was

created initially with acacia thorns, however in modern times it is simply done with razor blades. It is generally believed that scarring was developed because the dark pigmentation of the skin of the indigenous African people was not ideal for tattooing. By opening the skin, the uppermost layer of pigment was broken and filled with slightly lighter shades of scar tissue. There was just enough contrast for the marks to show after the wounds had finally healed (Fisher, 1990: 250).

Like contemporary Western cultures, beauty is very important to these tribes and while scarification can seem brutal, the entire practice contains significant symbolic and representational application. The scarring takes place during rituals to celebrate various meanings. Each social group defines their own rules about scarification, as this is their own culturally shared understanding. However, typically scars are made into repeated patterns that cover most of the skin. Among most tribes, children receive their first scars upon birth. Women's bodies are also scarred at certain stages throughout their life. The torso is scarred with certain patterns at about the age of ten and more are created under the breasts when a girl reaches puberty. A woman's arms, back and legs receive additional scars after the birth of her children. Without a completed scar pattern, women cannot be considered suitable for marriage. Among the Mursi and Bumi, scars are also applied to the faces, arms and bodies of men as records of personal accomplishments in war or hunting. While scars indicate a person's rank and age in society, most importantly they are essential for attracting the opposite sex. Without scars a person is often considered ugly, antisocial, cowardly or poor (Magubane, 2001: 82).





**Figure 2.1:** Tribal Scarification

Image from: Rand African Art. 2002. *Scarification and Cicatrisation among African cultures.*

([http://www.randafricanart.com/Scarification\\_and\\_Cicatrisation\\_among\\_African\\_cultures.html](http://www.randafricanart.com/Scarification_and_Cicatrisation_among_African_cultures.html))

## Representation within African Body Painting

Another form of cultural body adornment that reflects representation within these African cultures is the use of Body Paint. The Surma, Mursi and Bumi have practised the custom and are known for their unique techniques in body painting. They see their skin as the canvas for a painter, a medium to express their personal meaning with paint. In general, they go naked and decorate their whole body. Patterns can vary from warrior figures to frighten their enemies or to decorations that seduce the opposite sex. The added application of local plant material, fruits and feathers enhance these effects (Fisher, 1990: 270).



**Figure 2.2:** Tribal Body Painting

Silvester, H. 2008. *The painted people of the Surma tribes*: 26



**Figure 2.3:** Tribal Body Painting

Silvester, H. 2008. *The painted people of the Surma Tribe*: 25

## The Influence and meaning of Traditional Body Adornment within a Western Culture

### SCARIFICATION

Modern society is seen as a technological system lacking in ritual, myth or symbolization. Modern body adornment seems to have lost meaning as people are tattooing, piercing, painting and scarring their bodies to fit a trend rather than representing important characteristics of their own culture (Miller, 1997:1).

For instance, scarring may be an ancient art but it is certainly not one that is fading away. Although scarification originated on the African continent, many Europeans



and North and South Americans have adopted the practice. However these days the reasons for scarification are slightly different to that of ancient cultures and what they represent. Scars are still used to beautify the body with exotic patterns but the process and meaning is a far cry from the primitive rituals of the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes. In other words, nowadays scars are simply done to look good instead of dictating meaning (Miller, 1997:1).



**Figure 2.4:** Modern Westernized Scarification

Image from: CoolPictureGallery. 2010, *Insane scarification tattoo's*.

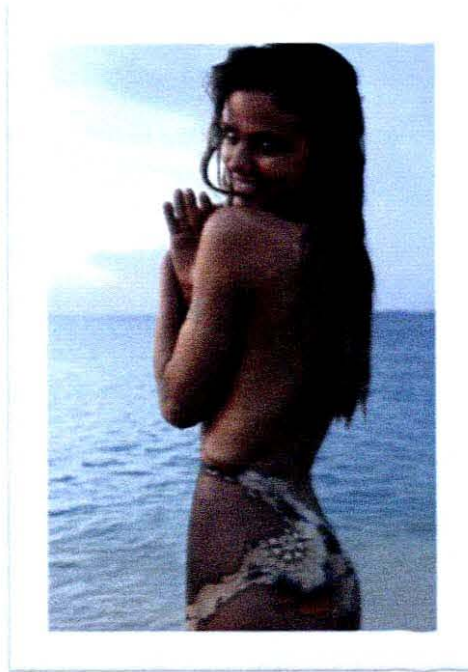
(<http://www.coolpicturegallery.net/2010/08/25-insane-scarification-tattoos.html>)

Modern scarification procedures are typically performed in a far more sterile environment. Today, most scarring takes place in a well-lighted body art shop, using sterilized surgical tools. Applying peroxide and petroleum jelly usually encourages irritation of the wounds to prolong the healing process and create richer scars – a process in contrast to ancient cultures that prefer to inflame cuts by rubbing them with ashes and other natural substances to make them swell and leave a heavier scarring (Miller, 1997:117).

## BODY PAINTING

Body painting saw a revival within Western cultures in the 1960's when "hippies" or the counterculture embraced the ideals of comfort in one's own body and the right to adorn it as one sees fit (Ebin, 1979: 20). Today, within our western culture the term body painting may encompass a full mural on a nude human body, a painting of a flower on a child's cheek, or a sports fan painting his favorite athlete's number on his back. All of these are considered valid examples of modern body painting.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, popular culture experienced a return to more traditional body painting. This was noted by a rise in demand for henna, the substance used to design traditional Indian Mendhi art. The trend of body painting has also found its way into various media and advertising outlets. Most notable, for example, is a section in the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition, where models wear nothing but painted bikinis. Playboy also has featured several layouts and advertisements with models in various types of body paint. And every day, body paint can be seen in its more "civilized" form as make-up (Miller, 1997: 8).



**Figure 2.5:** Modern Westernized body painting

Image from: Body Paint Body Art, 2009. *Sports illustrated models.*

(<http://body-paint-body-art.blogspot.com/2009/07/brooklyn-decker-sports-illustrated-body.html>)

## TATTOOING

Although Scarring is far more prominent in the Mursi, Surma and Bumi traditional cultures, the act of permanently marking the skin has also made its way into Western mainstream society as a modern genre of artistic expression. The idea of once again treating the body as a canvas has become popular within many Western lifestyles in the last few years, especially in the form of tattooing. However the reason for decorating the body with permanent etchings in our contemporary society is mainly for decoration and lacks meaning and representation (Miller, 1997: 16).

The cultural status of tattooing has steadily evolved from that of an anti-social activity into that of a trendy fashion statement. First adopted and flaunted by influential rock stars in the early 1970s, tattooing has become accepted by much

broader segments of mainstream society. Today, tattoos are routinely seen on rock stars, professional sports figures, fashion models, movie stars and other public figures that play a significant role in setting the culture's contemporary mores and behavior patterns (Miller,1997: 30).



**Figure 2.6:** Modern Westernized Tattooing

Image from: TLC Fansite. 2010, *Miami Ink*.

([http://tlc.discovery.com/fansites/miami-ink/kat\\_corner/katslideshownew\\_02.html](http://tlc.discovery.com/fansites/miami-ink/kat_corner/katslideshownew_02.html))

To conclude this chapter, it is apparent that body modification and adornments are culturally universal. All civilizations have attempted to change their body in order to fulfill their cultural construct of beauty as well as religious and/or social obligations. The idea that African body adornment and scarifications symbolize meaning and experiences in the lives of their specific culture, make it is safe to say that the theory of representation is certainly relevant. While traditional practices, although modified, are in many ways still much in use within our Western sub-culture, they



have unfortunately slowly evolved and lost most of the fascinating meaning and ritual behind the actual practice.

Therefore to answer my sub-question one: representation has a strong significance/impact on the outcome of body adornment – both in traditional and modern practices. Both intend a message – but while traditional adornment is an indication of conformity to custom (you would be conspicuous without it), much of modern body art is about attention-seeking (needing to be conspicuous with it) and messages of rebellion against conformity in society.

In light of the above, I have come to appreciate the link between body adornment and representation. I intend to portray elements of a life cycle within a series of DVD's and photographs that will demonstrate bodies adorned within my Western sub-cultural environment. And then, using three-dimensional, two-dimensional and non-permanent influences from African scarification and body painting, I will comment on the gradual Westernization of these beautiful primitive cultures and the direct influence they have had on the modern concept of body art.



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## CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of chapter three is to translate the theory component into an empirical setting. In the previous chapter the meaning behind traditional social symbols of body adornment and scarification techniques was outlined, specifically within the Mursi, Surma and Bumi tribes of Northern Africa. In this chapter, understanding of these symbols within the predominantly Western culture of South Africa, will be questioned, as these symbols still serve as the motivation for contemporary conceptual expressive representation.

Body adornment was used for various reasons in ancient times and is still very much in practice today. In most cultures body adornment can serve as a form of non-verbal communication. These permanent or non-permanent practices are part of what define us as human beings. They are a means of self-expression and a vehicle of self-awareness; two qualities that separate us from other living things on this planet. By conducting informal interviews with the owners and customers of Wildfire, a tattoo parlour in Cape Town, I will investigate if these social symbols have current meanings and what these meanings are, and how the application of such adornments has been modified.

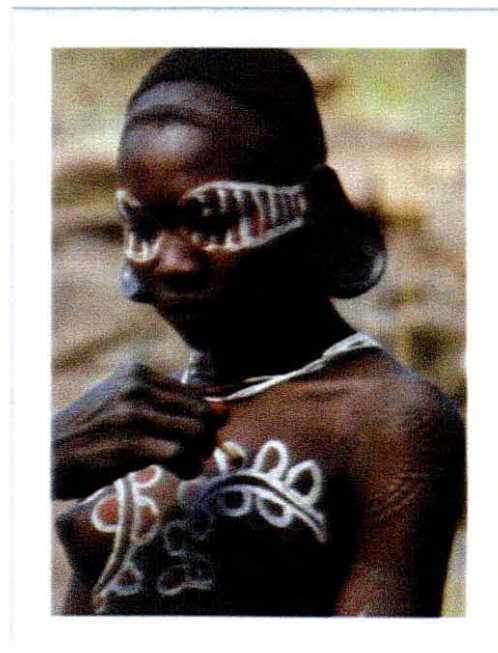
### Body Adornment within Traditional Culture

#### BODY PAINTING: Non-Permanent

Body painting is still used by the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes during rituals and ceremonies today (Figure 3.1). These proud people have a great sense of beauty and expression. Their creativity shows itself in the intricate designs which they use to decorate their own bodies to attract the opposite sex, as well as for important ceremonies - especially the stick fighting donga; the donga is the foundation for

complex and competitive social structure where the aim is to establish a champion or encourage a collective hostility before attacking an enemy tribe. Possessing little in the way of material things, body art is one of their prime means of artistic expression (Beckwith, 1990: 199).

In Figure 3.1 it is clear that tribes use body paint mixed from natural ingredients and smooth it on their skin with fingers, sticks or grass. Close friends often paint their faces with identical designs to reveal their bond with one another (Figure 3.2). Oil, clay, chalk, ash, cattle dung and urine are the most common paint ingredients. Specific colors are used to indicate certain periods in a person's life, such as puberty, courting and marriage, among other things. By looking at Figure 3.1 and 3.2 it is clear to see designs are created by tracing patterns onto each other's faces, chests, arms, and legs (Beckwith, 1990:200).



**Figure 3.1:** Tribal Body Painting

Fisher, A. 1990. Surma Body Painting. *Africa Adorned*: 81



**Figure 3.2:** Tribal Body Painting

Silvester, H. 2007. Mursi Children. *Ethiopia: Peoples of the Omo Valley*: 75

#### TATTOOING AND SCARRING

Tattooing is seldom found among the dark-skinned people of Africa, as they prefer decorative scarification. When this is done it looks as if the person has a swollen tattoo as it leaves a raised pattern on the skin. This is a very long and painful process (Magubane, 2001: 25).

Spirituality plays an important role within the Surma, Mursi and Bumi cultures, they believe in the presence of spirits around them, both good and evil. Scars are thought to beautify the body, and this journey for beauty through scarification often begins during childhood, especially for young African girls and boys.

Scarification is also viewed as a test of courage. Scarring is quite painful, and requires

great personal strength to get through the procedure without crying out in pain. To do so would be to humiliate oneself. Therefore the amount of scarring on a person's body correlates directly with his/her perceived strength and the more respected he/she will be within the community (Miller, 1997: 116).

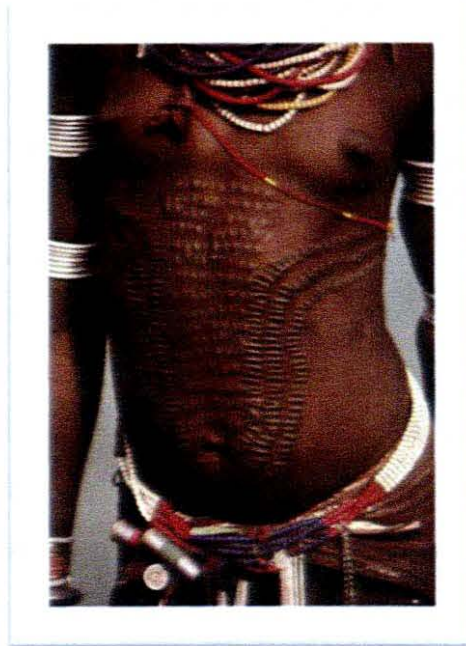
Scarring is especially prized in young women of marriageable age. Abdominal scars are seen as an indication of a woman's willingness to bear children (Figure 3.3). According to these African cultures, this is considered a very desirable quality in a future wife. The scars are also looked upon as sexually arousing, due to their tender nature. They are believed to make a woman more interested in her husband's sexual intentions. On reaching puberty the girl is ready to get married and the patterns are supposed to make the girl more attractive to men. The men find the patterns attractive to look at and enjoy touching them. The patterns are also an indication that the woman will be able to endure the pains of childbirth (Miller, 1997: 116).

Scarring can also be a matter of family pride. One coming of age ceremony for a young man includes asking his sisters to endure a ritual beating that leaves their backs scarred and bloody. The scars are viewed as signs of love and respect from the sisters for their brother, and the girls endure the ritual without showing their pain. This brings honor to the entire family (Miller, 1997: 116).

Scarring is also used as a means of protection and facial scarring is sometimes used to make a person less desirable to the spirit of death (Magubane, 2001: 25).

Scarification is mostly outlawed today due to the unacceptable levels of brutality inflicted, especially against women and children. Another major cause for its demise is modernity – as more and more younger people prefer to emulate Western cultures. Through the influence of volunteers and younger adults who return to visit or live with the tribes in their home villages, these and similar rituals – such as female circumcision – are experiencing reduced participation (Magubane, 2001: 25).





**Figure 3.3:** Tribal Scarification

Fisher, A. 1990. Surma Body Scarification. *Africa Adorned*: 14

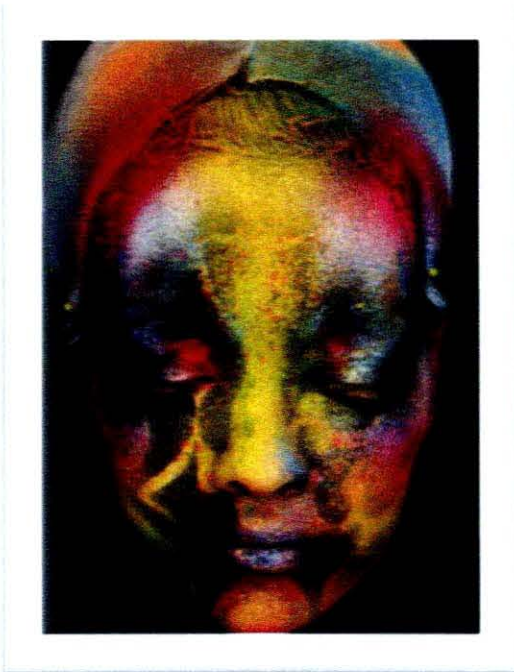
### Body Adornment within a Western Culture

Within the South African context of Western culture, we're witnessing a renewed interest in body adornment. Although these practices have always been around, they've usually bounced back and forth between acceptability and outsider status, depending on the cultural climate of any given period. However within Western culture it seems that body adornment may just be a trend and will disappear in a few years. The implication of modern body art in a Western culture is that it is lodged in materialism and individualism while traditional body art, barbaric as some of it may seem, reflects a sense of community, cherished customs, connectivity and communication; a beauty in its own right. Clearly, the key difference between trendiness and timelessness lies in the significance and forethought given to a work (Miller, 1997:5).

## **BODY PAINTING**

Today, Body Painting is a well-respected and recognized art form, represented by artists like Alex Box (Figure 3.4). Unlike tattooing and other forms of body art, body painting is temporary. Painted onto the human skin, it lasts for only several hours, or at most (in the case of Mehndi or henna) a couple of weeks. Ever since the Flower Power movement in the sixties, body painting has acquired a new legitimacy in the West. Increasing liberal views on nudity have also helped. However, body painting is not always portrayed as large pieces on fully nude bodies, but can involve smaller designs on more restricted areas of skin acceptably revealed by otherwise clothed bodies (Miller, 1997: 74).

Many body-painting artists work professionally as body painters across the world. Their work is seen regularly in television commercials. Body painters also work frequently in the film arena especially in science fiction with more and more elaborate alien creations being body painted. Stills advertising also use body painting with an ever-growing variety of body painting appearing on the pages of the world's magazines every year.



**Figure 3.4:** Body Art, Alex Box. 2009.

Image form: Word Press. 2009, *Make-Up Fantasy*.

(<http://andibelle.wordpress.com>)

In our South African Western culture body painting is seen every day in its more “civilized” form as make-up. Body painting and the use of “stick-on” tattoos are very popular among teenagers as the art form is temporary and can easily be changed.

## TATTOOING

Tattooing is an extension of body painting, but it is permanent. Tattooing is a worldwide phenomenon. Since the 1990's tattooing has become very popular and has once again become a form of body adornment for Western culture. In fact, long gone are the days when tattoos were the sole preserve of vagabond sailors, white supremacists and hardened criminals. These days you can't switch on the television or open a magazine without seeing a sport's star or celebrity supporting 'new ink'.



And you'd be amazed at how much body art is hidden beneath the collar and tie corporate armour worn by those in big business. The use of tattoos is sometimes even used as permanent make-up.

In Western culture tattoos have made major inroads into mainstream society. As Simon White (Figure Five), owner of Cape Town's popular parlour Wildfire Tattoos, explains:

"It's not as underground as it was. We're now in the mainstream. We're tattooing average people, day in and day out. My average client is in their mid-thirties, male or female, and from all walks of life. It's quite expensive nowadays, especially for the bigger pieces, so you're looking at people who have good jobs and can afford it. That has elevated the status of tattooing (Bosworth, 2010: 16)."

The fact that a Wildfire branch is located at Canal Walk – the zenith of modern consumer culture – and is listed under "health and beauty" on the information board, is a sign that skin art has become a sought-after commodity for those who can afford it. You can now pick up designer jeans, new shoes and a 'tatt' all in the same shopping session.

Vastly different from traditional cultures and methods of tattooing, the store itself is immaculate. Health and sterilization regulations are stringently adhered to. Tattoo art even has its own annual symposium nowadays, and Southern Ink Xposure which features artists from around the globe, was again held at the Cape Town International Convention centre this year. All further proof of just how mainstream and acceptable body art is becoming.

The media has certainly played a role in driving the popular tattoo culture. Popular reality show *Miami Ink*, which aired on the Discovery channel, focused on providing insights into customers and stories behind their tattoos at a popular Miami parlour. That's alongside the Hollywood A-listers such as Angelina Jolie, Johnny Depp and

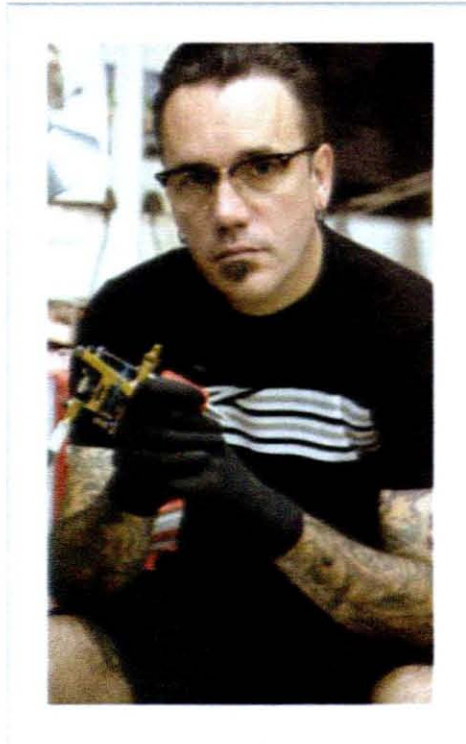
Megan Fox, to name a few who proudly display their ink (Bosworth, 2010: 16). " In today's Western societies and cultures which are largely influenced by celebrities, it sends a message of "it's cool to have a tattoo."

Today in South Africa's Western culture one can only legally get a tattoo at sixteen years of age provided there is parental consent. Because no matter how mainstream the art has become, it is still frowned upon within the business world, and tattoos on the face or hands could destroy opportunities for obtaining work within conventional organizations.

The relationship between mainstream religion and tattoos is also complex. Views on tattoos seem to differ as widely as the number of belief systems. There are Christians with bible verses, angels, crosses and other holy insignia etched into their skin, while others wouldn't dream of it. And, while Hinduism has no qualms with tattoos, they are strictly forbidden in Sunni Islamic lore. Tattoos are mentioned in the Torah, and the tattooing of prisoner numbers onto inmates in the death camps during the holocaust further vilified tattoos in Jewish culture. Yet there are still some adherents who are inked, and some even proudly wear Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David, as a testament of their belief (Bosworth, 2010: 17).

As with any art form today, tattoos are highly subjective. Ultimately the significance of the tattoo to the wearer is what is important. Asking a customer at Wildfire the reason for acquiring her tattoo, she answered, "When you have a tattoo you become so in touch with yourself" (Bosworth, 2010: 16).

However, the main reasons and answers I attained for why people in my sub-culture are tattooing themselves, were "self-expression and decoration". It does however seem people these days do it just to be trendy, they see a friend or a celebrity "icon" has it and they want it done.



**Figure 3.5:** Andy Lund, Simon White owner of Wildfire Tattoo's. 2010.

## SCARRING

For most contemporary Western cultures, body scarification remains hidden behind a veil of mystery. Like tattoos and piercings, scarification is either a taste acquired through cultural exposure or an instant and long-lasting body art addiction.

Body scarification is nearly as old as the human race and is still widely practiced in Northern African among the Buma, Mursi and Surma tribes (Beckwith, 1990: 18). However the process has altered over time to include better and safer methodology, but the underlying principle remains the same. As the term suggests, scarification involves permanently modifying the skin by creating scars. In recent years, this once archaic and geographically-focused practice has evoked interest within Western

cultures as people became aware of scarring as a form of body art, as well as developing an understanding of its cultural basis (Miller, 1997:16).

The complexity of modern times, coupled with the struggle to stand apart from the crowd, has created new justification for purposely scarring the body. But modern practice is in considerable contrast to that of the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes who scar their bodies for cultural acceptance. Today, reasons for scarring the body are deeply intimate for the most part, and as unique as the people who seek out the process. When questioning clients at Cape Town's tattoo parlour on Long Street, the predominant answer seemed to be that cutting and scarring the body is said to produce feelings of euphoria due to the release of endorphins, which in turn can magnify the intensity of some forms of spirituality and, in some cases, actually cause a form of addiction.

## Findings

By researching and conducting informal interviews with the owner and ten different customers of Wildfire, a tattoo parlour in Cape Town, I have derived whether modern body art reflects any relevant social symbols and what these may mean, and how the application of such adornments has been modified over time.

Traditional Body Painting	Modern Body Painting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worn during ceremonies</li> <li>• Made from clay, charcoal and other natural pigments</li> <li>• Used to mark different stage's in one's life</li> <li>• Prime means of artistic expression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in body painting competitions</li> <li>• Manufactured in bulk for a consuming Western society</li> <li>• Mainly used within advertising</li> <li>• Debate about the legitimacy of body painting as an art form</li> </ul>

**Table One: Meanings and Signification of Body Adornments**

From the above discussion, it is clear to see that ritual and meaning have been removed from the body adornment process, and the use of body paint is justified as an art rather than any form of cultural expressive representation.

Traditional Tattooing and Scarring	Modern Tattooing and Scarring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark certain rights of passage in one's life</li> <li>• Always carries some form of meaning</li> <li>• Always involves a ritual ceremony</li> <li>• Scarring always carries meaning</li> <li>• Indication of conformity to custom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trend orientated</li> <li>• Mostly recorded in era's as to when tattoo's are in fashion</li> <li>• Very seldom if ever involves a ceremony</li> <li>• Does not necessarily involve meaning</li> <li>• Messages of rebellion against conformity</li> </ul>

**Table Two: Meanings and Signification of Body Modification**

Here it is clear that modern individuals may tattoo/ scar their bodies for all sorts of reasons, trivial or profound, but ancient and traditional societies possess serious and conscious reasoning. Today, tattoos are often rather used to rebel against cultural norms, than conform with the cultural 'language' of body adornment.

To conclude, all procedures of permanent body adornment involve some degree of pain, this memory shows the wearer that they are changed forever. However, in a contemporary Western culture methods and medicine allow for body modification in a much less painful manner.

Examples of recent body adornments, which are inspired by traditional cultures, showed that although still very much in practice, in many cases the meaning has

been lost. The motivational routes of Western adornments are today based on what looks good as opposed to a ritual or right of passage that marks the event for life on a participant's body. By linking ritual and meaning into my practical pieces and taking influence from the non-permanent adornments of these African tribes, my artworks shall portray meaning and comment on the evolution of culture and how Western lifestyle is diluting our social being with trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter specifically reflects on body scarification/modification in the form of body painting and scarification as it takes place within Northern African cultures. This has been done to see how these specific forms of representation have been used as the motivation for creating contemporary non-permanent forms of conceptual expression.

I have drawn direct inspiration from the Surma, Bumi and Mursa tribes in order to create my own form of contemporary non-permanent body art. In this way I hope to portray in a conceptual framework, a life cycle that comments on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western. I will also endeavour to show how Western lifestyle has diluted the relevance of this ancient social interaction with short-term trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

In this chapter, I will go on to discuss each of my conceptual adornments separately, giving a brief description of the inspiration, followed by an explanation of each work.

I have researched and analyzed different forms of body adornment and modification within the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes in order to gain insight and to discover the true meanings of body modification within the traditional environment. It was difficult however, to determine the actual meaning of each tribe's scarring (marks of distinction) as multiple, overlapping meanings tend to underlie different decorations within these societies (Fisher, 1990: 40). Generally however, these permanent body markings are used to emphasize fixed social, political and religious roles. Facial scarification is used for identification of groups, families or individuals, but also used to express personal beauty. It is also performed on girls to mark stages of the life process, such as puberty and marriage (Fisher, 1990: 40). These markings assist in making them more attractive to men, as the scars are regarded as appealing to touch as well as to look at, but also as testimony that women will be able to



withstand the pain of childbirth.

Nowadays however, within the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes, scarification patterns can mainly be seen on the elderly, forcing us to realize how Western cultures are impacting on tribal rituals. Another influence is that most youngsters are leaving these remote areas and drifting to cities where they invariably discard these age-old practices. The introduction of Western medicine has also aided in diminishing these harsh practices (Geoffroy-Schneiter, 2007: 57)

The practice of adornment/modification of bodies within these rural cultures may fade entirely over time. However this is not to say that a portion of Western culture does not use similar techniques of expressing and representing themselves. By conducting informal interviews with customers at the well-known tattoo parlor "Wildfire" in Cape Town, I ascertained that people these days adorn their bodies for very little reason or meaning but rather to be trendy. The use of tattoos has even extended to permanent make-up. Modern individuals seem to do it for all sorts of reasons, trivial or profound, but ancient and traditional societies possess serious and conscious reasoning behind their practice (Polhemus, 2004: 8).

By linking my own interpretation to my practical pieces as well as using materials from my own natural environment, as these tribes do, I hope my body art generates a deeper understanding and awareness of body adornment as an unspoken representational system.

## **Process**

When starting the process of adorning the body, I quickly became aware that working on a three-dimensional canvas was extremely difficult in contrast to using a two-dimensional one. Not only am I referring to the aspect of dimension, but the fact that you are adorning another human being using non-permanent materials. I had imagined and planned many things, however when trying to apply many of

these techniques they did not work as planned. These included embroidery, stone, water-based paint and porcelain.

When I first began, it seemed that a subconscious boundary acted as an unspoken element between the model and myself. In our Western culture – in stark contrast to tribal culture – we're expected to be clothed when interacting; and there is also an element of personal space. This Western 'boundary' initially limited where and what I could adorn. Overcoming this seemed tricky at first, as designing on the body was difficult enough, but as time went on we both started to relax and I was able to push for more authentic designs.

Once again however, unlike the Surma, Bumi and Mursi tribes, I had to document each of my works; factors that I would never have imagined arose and had to be taken into account. These entailed good lighting and very few 'natural' elements. Being the middle of winter it was difficult apply adornments without my model feeling uncomfortable and this served as a great challenge. As I went on I began to realize how every person – the photographer, model and myself – were as important as the other, and although we may not have been performing a tribal ritual, we were creating our own production.

Each design started with no direct purpose and no restraints. My only aim was to evolve from rural inspired to urban inspired and to make sure this transition was evident. I worked from a 'do and then see' perspective and slowly each work molded its own creation.

Figure 4.1: Fertility



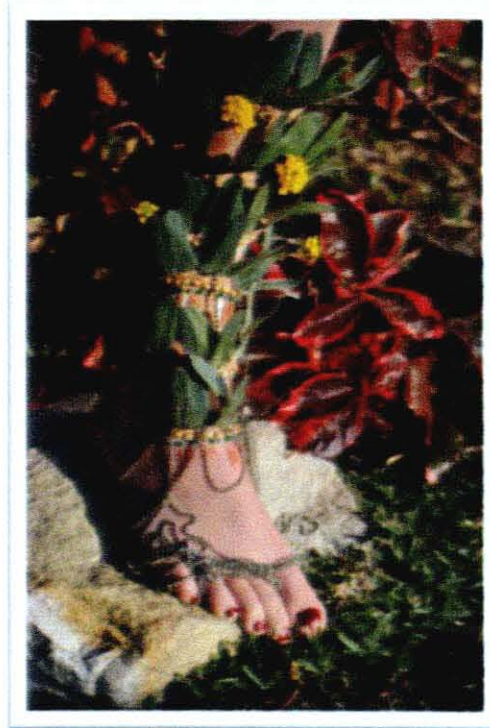
I began my adornments with elements from my own natural environment. Traditional influence inspired me completely. They use materials within hand's reach, a multitude of plants inspiring fanciful and ephemeral self-decoration. A leaf, root, seed pod, or flower is quickly transformed into an accessory. As in the West one might don a hat, people create caps from tufts of grass (Silvester, 2008: 14). Therefore in the work 'Fertility' I began the life cycle on the stomach with twigs, seeds, sticks and sand. I wanted to imagine what it would be like in Northern Africa with only the earth and nature as my raw materials. The Surma tribe directly influenced the design on the stomach as they have raised the custom of body painting in traditional Africa to an amazing art form. Within their culture scarring on the stomach also portrays a woman's willingness to bare children (Silvester, 2008: 40). I was greatly influenced by photographs I saw of the Surma tribe and how they used the elements of Mother Nature to create and decorate their bodies.

## Design 4.2: Birth



Representing birth, I wanted the design's focal point to be the hipbone. As women, one of our greatest assets is the ability to bare children and for me our hips add beauty and control to a woman's physique. Bringing in slightly more colour, the red branches stuck on the stomach resemble umbilical cords connecting mother to child, the root of all life. The raised 'scars' are once again directly influenced by traditional African cultures with scars on their hips and stomach as testimony that women will be able to withstand the pain of childbirth. The seeds continue to tell the story of the beginning of new life.

### Design 4.3: Youth

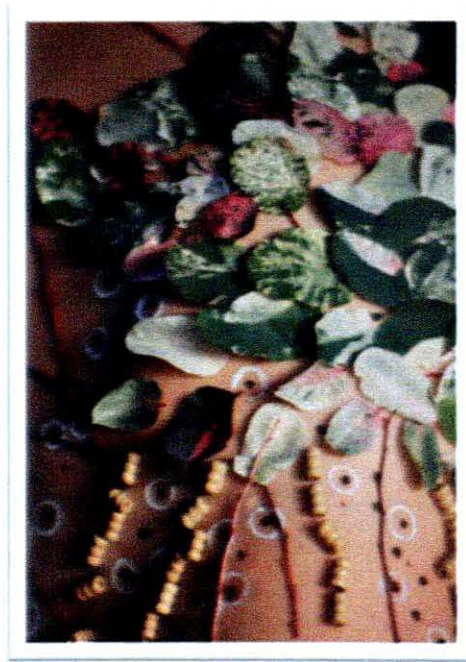


In this design I focused on the use of colour. I chose to use the lower part of the leg as this part of the body symbolizes youth to me. The design started mainly with ingredients from my own natural environment, being leaves, flowers and seeds. I kept the initial colour palette similar to that of my African influence, using clay-like colours with accents of white, and eventually introducing brightly coloured blue and green plastic beads.

The metallic component, a piece of metal chain, was brought into the design to represent the burdens life will bring – and the harsh reality of old traditions being replaced by the less meaningful characteristics of Westernization. Another element I intentionally left untouched, was the model's nail varnish, a clear influence of Western culture.



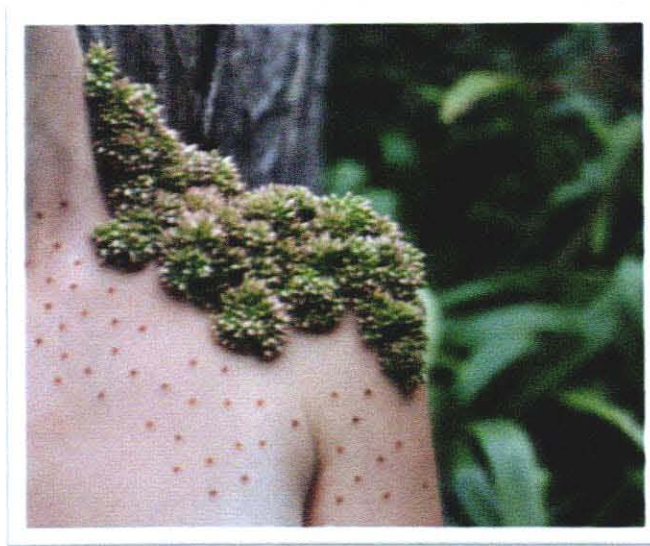
#### Design 4.4: Growth



Although still predominantly using materials from my own natural environment, it became more challenging as I brought in more elements from the Western world. Gradually combining man-made materials with elements such as stems and leaves, this piece – growing up the side of the model's lower hip – specifically resembles influences of traditional African and modern Western cultures merging as I introduced the element of manufactured wooden beads.

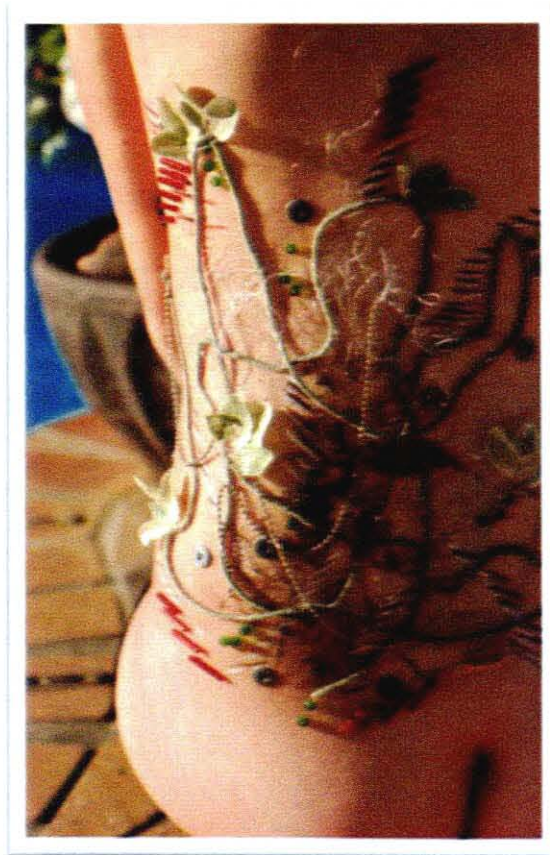
This piece resembles growth. The intricate, detailed and exciting colours of the leaves start to change and depict the complexity of life.

#### Design 4.5: Puberty



Although by far not the simplest stage of life, I chose 'puberty' to be one of my most uncomplicated designs. Puberty (especially for women) is one of the most rigorous times in one's life as our bodies change from child to adolescence. By using the collar bone and neck following down the breast this design speaks of beauty and change and coming of age. The texture and colour of the plant up against the skin is particularly striking – and the three-dimensional aspect makes reference to traditional scarring, as this stage of life is usually where most scarring and ritual takes place.

#### Design 4.6: Adolescence



Looking back at pictures of my traditional influence, it became quite clear that the adolescents of the tribes are especially adept at the art of adorning their bodies. As young artists they are imbued with an exquisite sense of color and form, and paint their beautiful bodies with colourful dots, stripes and circles, as well as encasing themselves in elaborate arrangements of vegetation and found objects (Geoffroy-Schneiter, 2007: 40).

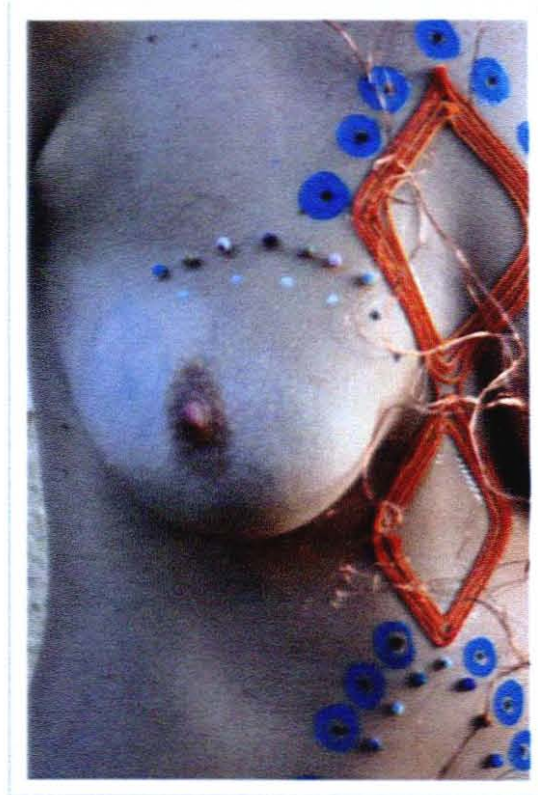
Living within a Western culture it was still easy however to relate to this stage of life, as it is usually here that we begin to experiment with eyeliner, lipstick and more permanent body adornments, such as piercings.

This design depicts confusion. We see extremely traditional elements of Mother Nature, yet entangled by pieces of metallic string and silver beading. Western



influence is gradually being transported into the framework. This depicts the struggle of abandoning traditional cultures and customs to enjoy those of the West.

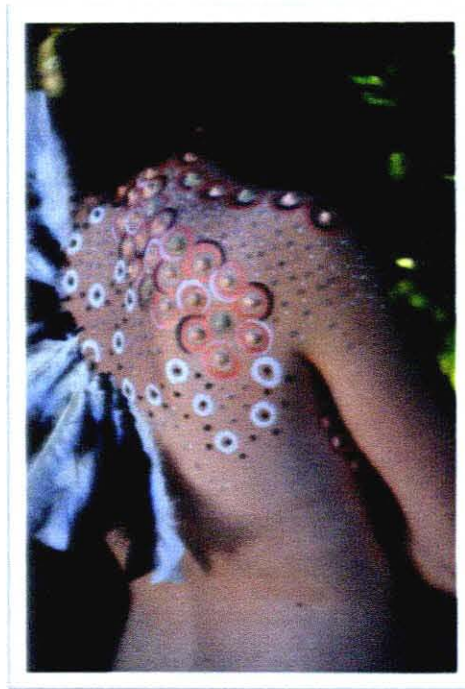
**Design 4.7: Motherhood**



With obvious reason motherhood is represented by breasts. Within my Westernized South African sub-culture, a woman's breasts are a taboo: they are supposed to be hidden. Exposing woman's breasts in public is considered shameful and inappropriate (indecent exposure) even on beaches or while breastfeeding. In other words, breasts are supposed to be covered at all times. Hence it was here that I decided to make a statement beginning with her breasts alone. Her breasts are exposed, as within my tribal influence and in contrast to my Westernized South African sub-culture this is the ultimate beauty. I wanted to communicate the beauty and celebration of becoming a mother as the Mursi, Burmi and Surma do with tribal

rituals. The Glass beads once again show the influence of Western culture and the copper around her neck is to depict the gradual divide between urban and rural.

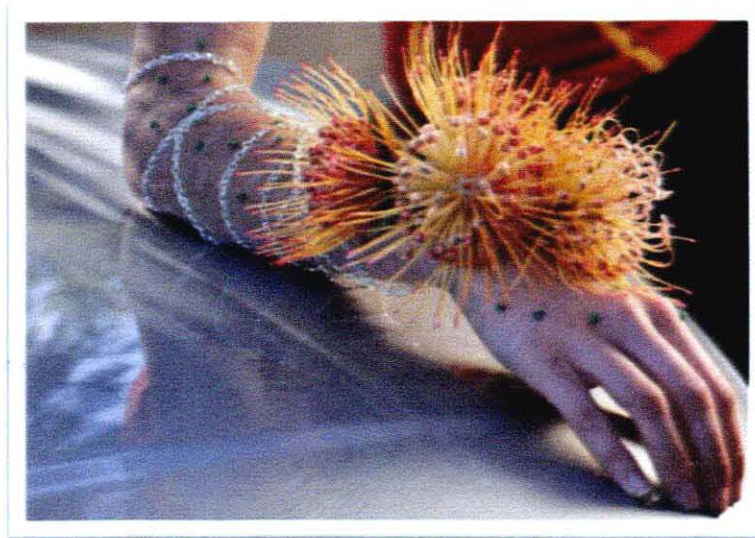
#### Design 4.8: Release



In this design the raised scarring-like marks on the back and shoulder are still depicting traditional influence, however they are embellished with gold pigment, as this is a direct contrast between tribal and Western, rural and Urban. After giving birth, women from traditional cultures often perform rituals associated with the creation of a lifelong bond with their child. Both mother and child are usually marked.

In this design I tried to recreate traditional scarring and body painting patterns purely by using materials from an industrialized Western world. The 'scars' are made from a material called FX Wax mostly used within motion picture make-up. I used manufactured paint to recreate circular designs around the scarring, emulating tribal influence. The feathers are fake and dyed as these are far easier to find in a mall than finding feathers in my own natural environment.

#### Design 4.9: Blossom

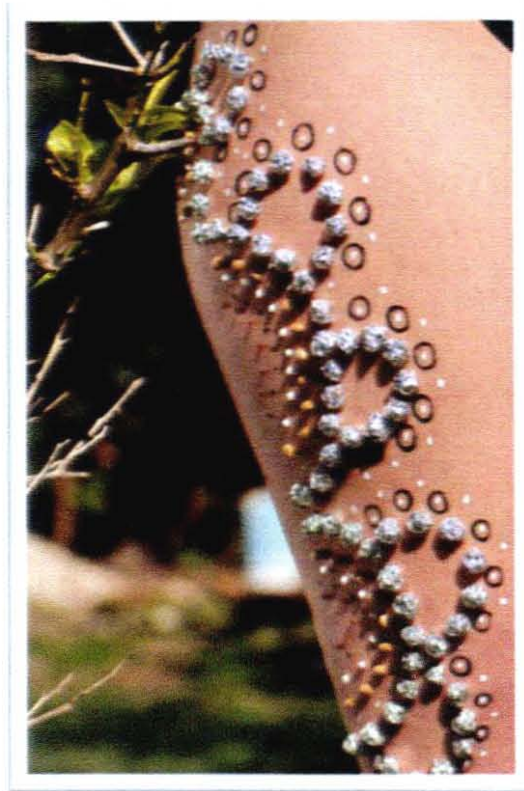


Here I tried to think of things we pride ourselves on within the South African Western culture. What came to mind were things like clothing, jewelry and fancy watches. The Surma, Mursi and Burma tribes pride themselves on their scars and how many they carry. For them, the custom of body painting can also just be about decorating themselves and self-expression for enjoyment rather than only a ceremonial purpose.

Therefore in this design I concentrated mainly on decoration. The beautiful natural element of the Protea is put in place where in Western society you are more likely to find a watch or a piece of jewelry. I entangled the model's arm and hand with silver as well as plastic manufactured beads. She is fully clothed in Western recognized garments which work well with the natural colours and elements of the Protea.

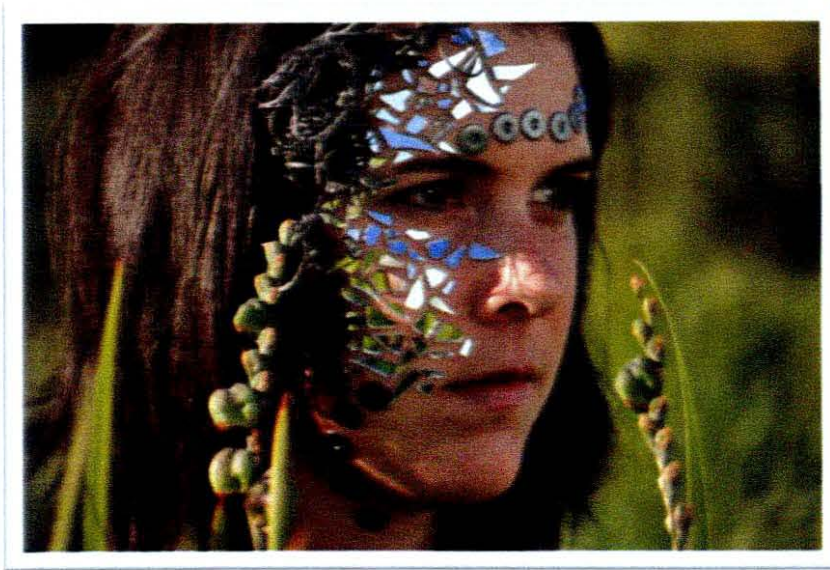


#### Design 4.10: Ripe



As stated before, the pattern of the scars found within the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes are often unique to each group. And for each group, the scars serve as symbols of beauty, strength, and status. In this design I decided to take direct influence from the patterning of scars as seen in the Surma tribe – but using contemporary materials such as foil, and manufactured wooden and plastic beads. I have created a three-dimensional design on the upper leg and buttocks of my model as this is where women are usually scarred after giving birth to a child. Scars on the legs are usually an elaborate pattern of dots which form lines and curves.

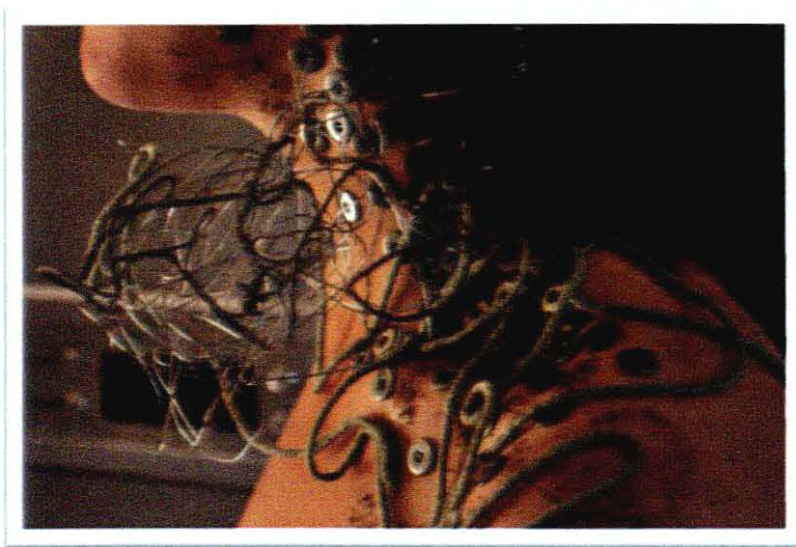
#### Design 4.11: Mature



Capturing extremely Western elements in an outdoor environment turned out to be aesthetically pleasing. Using solely modern materials to portray a conceptual representation of urban or Western body art turned out to be easier than expected. I chose to use pieces of mirror as the main aspect of this design because of the way in which the mirrors captured images of the natural surroundings. I also chose to create this design on the model's face, as much of modern body art/adornment within Western culture is about attention-seeking. Moving the design towards her head (brain) also reflects a new way of thinking. She will no longer succumb to traditional practices as she now believes in a Western way of living.

The metal beading has a similar shape to the circles tribes usually painted onto their bodies, however these are manufactured and metal. The messy string falling from her hair represents confusion. It is now that she suffers the confusion of where she came from and where she presently belongs.

Design 4.12: Worn



Finally, completely entangled and diluted by Western life, the design appears mechanical with no influence of traditional practice. The wire around her neck is there as if to choke her. Her life is now filled with nothing more than memories of a traditional past.

To conclude, I have shown that my research has been applied practically in the creation of a contemporary non-permanent form of conceptual expression. Like my tribal inspiration, this form of art is endlessly inventive, magical and, above all, fun. This in turn reflects the intended representation with the use of innovative materials and techniques successfully. These designs create a new and visual impact which, while in contrast to the traditional body adornment/modification of the past, shows a continuing tradition of creative possibility within the craft.

What I found during this process was that while traditional tribal body adornment remained restricted by parameters of expression within a particular culture, modern body adornment expresses unrestricted inventiveness, reflecting the freedom and individuality that is the hallmark of Western culture. Body adornment, built upon and yet rinsed clean of its tribal origins and meanings, is still one of humankind's most effective 'messaging systems' in the world today.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

By using the body as a canvas, I have investigated the link between representation and body adornment. The aim of my investigation was to see whether different traditional African practices could serve as legitimate inspiration for expressive representation in our contemporary Western sub-cultural society.

Through representation, signs and symbols are used, which can either be hand-painted objects, material objects or images, and these are all used to represent or embody to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings.

In chapter two, I outlined the subject of body adornment and modification (body painting and scarification) as methods of expression within a theoretical framework, in order to determine their meaning within a particular cultural context. By focusing on the two and three-dimensional aspects of traditional African scarification and body adornment, specifically amongst the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes, I aimed to discover what the dying traditions of body adornment and modification meant to them.

The purpose of chapter three was to relate the theory component into an empirical setting. I aimed to discover what esoteric social symbols lay behind body adornment and scarification techniques represented in both traditional and Western cultures. I specifically focused on the Mursi, Surma and Bumi tribes of Northern Africa in contrast with the predominantly Western culture of South Africa, and how these tribal traditions might serve as legitimate inspiration for contemporary conceptual expressive representation.



Therefore, through the practical component of my research, I have adorned different parts of a woman's body within my Western sub-cultural setting, taking great influence from the traditional African cultures of the Mursi, Bumi and Surma tribes in Northern Africa.

Representation has a strong significance/impact on the outcome of body adornment – both in traditional and modern practices. Both intend a message – but while traditional adornment is an indication of conformity to custom (you would be conspicuous without it), much of modern body art is about attention-seeking (needing to be conspicuous with it) and messages of rebellion against conformity in society.

By linking meaning into my practical pieces as well as using non-permanent elements and materials from my own natural environment, as these tribes do, my aim was to generate contemporary body art in a way that reflects a deeper understanding and awareness of body adornment and exactly what it represents. I wanted to portray in a conceptual framework, a life cycle that comments on the evolution of culture from rural to urban, and from traditional to Western, and how Western lifestyle is diluting our social being with trends rather than using the method of body adornment as a cultural conversation.

What I found during this process was that while traditional tribal body adornment remained restricted by parameters of expression within a particular culture, modern body adornment expresses unrestricted inventiveness, reflecting the freedom and individuality that is the hallmark of Western culture. Body adornment, built upon and yet rinsed clean of tribal origins and meanings, is still one of humankind's most effective 'messaging systems' in the world today.

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Rand African Art. 2002. *Scarification and Cicatrisation among African cultures.*

[Online 16 October 2010]. Available:

[http://www.randafricanart.com/Scarification and Cicatrisation among African cultures.html](http://www.randafricanart.com/Scarification%20and%20Cicatrisation%20among%20African%20cultures.html)

### Figure 2.2: Tribal Body Painting

Silvester, H. 2008. *Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration from Africa.* London: Thames and Hudson Ltd: 26

### Figure 2.3: Tribal Body Painting

Silvester, H. 2008. *Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration from Africa.* London: Thames and Hudson Ltd: 25

### Figure 2.4: Modern Westernized Scarification

CoolPictureGallery. 2010, *Insane scarification tattoo's.*

[Online 16 October 2010]. Available:

<http://www.coolpicturegallery.net/2010/08/25-insane-scarification-tattoos.html>

### Figure 2.5: Modern Westernized body painting

Body Paint Body Art, 2009. *Sports illustrated models.*

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**Figure 2.6: Modern Westernized Tattooing**

TLC Fansite. 2010, *Miami Ink*.

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[http://tlc.discovery.com/fansites/miami-ink/kat\\_corner/katslideshownew\\_02.html](http://tlc.discovery.com/fansites/miami-ink/kat_corner/katslideshownew_02.html)

**Figure 3.1: Tribal Body Painting**

Fisher, A. 1990. *Africa Adorned*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams, Inc. :81

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Silvester, H. 2007. *Ethiopia: Peoples of the Omo Valley*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams, Inc. :75

**Figure 3.3: Tribal Scarification**

Fisher, A. 1990. *Africa Adorned*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams, Inc. : 14

**Figure 3.4: Body Art, Alex Box. 2009.**

Word Press. 2009, *Make-Up Fantasy*.

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**Figure 3.5: Andy Lund, Simon White owner of Wildfire Tattoo's. 2010.**