

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
POETRY AND PICTURES POETRY WORKSHOP
NOVEMBER 2020 : TATTOOS**

© Sara-Jane Arbury



EXERCISE ONE: Warm up writing exercise – Me-taphors

Write about yourself in a series of images (metaphors) that describe you and your personality/character as other things (as if you ARE something else).

Be as imaginative and descriptive as you like. Remember it is the little details that bring an image or 'word picture' to life, eg:

I am a cork popping from a champagne bottle on New Year's Eve.

I am a dry pavement taking a daily pounding of feet.

I am a well-thumbed book on a shelf of a second-hand bookshop.

You may 'open up' your images further like this:

I am a green leaf on a tree, one of many, and I love to dance and quiver and shake to the wind's music... I am happy, I don't want to let go of my tree and float away. I hold on for as long as I can.

You may write about another person if you wish.

Here are some image suggestions to help you:

If you were a landscape or place, what would you be?

If you were a type of weather, what would you be?

If you were a piece of furniture, what would you be?

If you were a vehicle, what would you be?

If you were something that grows in the garden, what would you be?

If you were an item of clothing, what would you be?

If you were a type of food or drink, what would you be?

If you were a time of day, what would you be?

If you were an animal or bird, what would you be?

If you were a piece of music, what would you be?

If you were a colour, what would you be?

See Appendix 1 "Who We Are", a poem created by the group from this exercise

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this writing exercise is Body Art (body painting and tattoos)

Look at the images, clockwise from L to R on the single sheet of six pictures:



1. Nanaia Mahuta, New Zealand's Foreign Minister

From CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/02/asia/new-zealand-foreign-minister-intl-hnk/index.html>

New Zealand appointed its first Indigenous female foreign minister to represent what's shaping up to be one of the most diverse parliaments in the world.

Nanaia Mahuta, who is Māori, the Indigenous people of New Zealand, four years ago also became the country's first female member of parliament to wear a moko kauae, a traditional tattoo on her chin.

She is related to the late Māori queen and the current Māori monarch. In 2016, Mahuta took part in a traditional moko -- or Māori tattooing design -- ceremony, and became the first woman to wear a moko kauae to parliament.

Moko are hugely symbolic and contain information about a person's ancestry, history and status. There are also sacred protocols around tā moko -- the act of applying a moko to a person. Historically, moko were applied with chisels but now tattoo machines are often used.

At the time, Mahuta said she hadn't given a lot of thought to how her tattoo would break new ground. "I've just thought about more a longer projection of my walk in life and kind of the way I want to go forward and make a contribution. That's the main thing for me," she said.

Rukuwai Tipene-Allen, a political journalist who also wears a moko kauae, said Mahuta's appointment was hugely significant. "The first face that people see at an international level is someone who speaks, looks and sounds like a Māori," she said. "The face of New Zealand is Indigenous. It shows that our culture has a place at an international level, that people see the importance of Māori, and the point of difference that being Māori brings to such a role. Wearing the markings of her ancestors shows people that there are no boundaries to Māori and where they can go."

More info about moko: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C4%81_moko

Tattoo arts are common in the Eastern Polynesian homeland of the Māori people, and the traditional implements and methods employed were similar to those used in other parts of Polynesia. In pre-European Māori culture, many if not most high-ranking persons received moko. Moko were associated with high social status.

Receiving moko constituted an important milestone between childhood and adulthood, and was accompanied by many rites and rituals. Apart from signalling status and rank, another reason for the practice in traditional times was to make a person more attractive to the opposite sex. Men generally received moko on their faces, buttocks (raperape) and thighs (puhoro). Women usually wore moko on their lips (kauwae) and chins. Other parts of the body known to have moko include women's foreheads, buttocks, thighs, necks and backs and men's backs, stomachs, and calves.

Historically the skin was carved by uhi (chisels), rather than punctured as in normal tattooing; this left the skin with grooves rather than a smooth surface. Later needle tattooing was used. Originally tohunga-tā-moko (moko specialists) used a range of uhi (chisels) made from albatross bone which were hafted onto a handle, and struck with a mallet.

Since 1990 there has been a resurgence in the practice of tā moko for both men and women, as a sign of cultural identity and a reflection of the general revival of the language and culture.

In 2016 New Zealand politician Nanaia Mahuta had a moko kauae. When she became foreign minister in 2020, a writer said that her facial tattoo was inappropriate for a diplomat. There was much support for Mahuta, who said "there is an emerging awareness about the revitalisation of Māori culture and that facial moko is a positive aspect of that."

2. Emma Fay – Concept Body Artist

<https://emma-fay.co.uk/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Fay

Emma Fay is an English visual artist specialising in body painting and makeup. Her painted human bodies are documented through photography and film, as well as being created as live installations. Fay has created artwork for commercial domains and her own fine art practice.

UK artist Emma Fay uses concept body artistry to create exhibitions, media and live installations. Painting on the human canvas to create artworks that challenge visual perception, Emma's approach uses symbolic expression and illusion, while her inspiration is derived from the natural world, humanities and social science.

Born in 1987, Emma's education in the arts, beauty industry and business allowed her to combine knowledge and skills to manipulate the human form into unique bodies of work that appear in photographed exhibits, live performances and film.

She transforms models into a range of animals, birds and insects and reptiles using water-based paints. She spends about five hours on each creation and many of the models assume Yoga positions that give their bodies the shapes ready for painting.

3. Doc Price – the UK's oldest tattooist

<https://www.meettheleader.com/interviews/my-story-doc-price>

<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2019/mar/21/britains-oldest-tattooist-ive-covered-around-28-acres-of-skin>

From online magazine *Meet The Leader*:

Darrell "Doc" Price is 86. He mightn't be the world's oldest tattooist (there is talk of a 101-year-old woman in the Burmese mountains). But he reckons he's definitely the oldest in Europe. And he's inked, freehand, something in the vicinity of between 28 and 40 acres of skin.

During that time, he's witnessed the art form rise from the underground to the mainstream: one in five people now have a tattoo. Even David Dimbleby has a tattoo – a six-legged scorpion on his right shoulder, received when he was a youthful 75.

Doc reckons "social media has a lot to do with it", along with the influence of friends and partners: "Young people now need to impress other young people." But he also cites the quality of modern designs. "They're incredibly beautiful compared to what it was in my day, when you had just seven needle heads and a bit of colouring in a dish." Back then, you could only choose between red, green, yellow, primary colours. "When I saw my first ever blue ink tattoo, I was jumping up and down with tears."

He first became fascinated with the art while growing up in Hereford. He'd been mesmerised by a blue butterfly design on the back of a former sailor's hand, and for the young Doc, the idea that something could live forever on someone's body was truly magical.

When he was 13, he got one of his own, from an “ancient guy” called Billy Knight in Cardiff. “I had to go and convince my mother, because I come from a family where nobody got tattooed” he says. His tattoo said, simply, ‘Mother.’ His mum loved it, although his father wasn’t best pleased. “Why couldn’t it have said ‘Dad’? So I had to go back the next week. It said ‘Dad.’ I didn’t realise how painful it was going to be, because in those days they didn’t clean their needles properly. It was very, very, primitive.”

He inked his first tattoo, a French Legion cross, around the same time (“You could get away with it because you went to work at 14 in those days”). But he had to work it out on his own. “In my generation, there were no apprenticeships. You were either born into a tattoo family or outside. And if you were born outside you had to teach yourself.”

A few years later, he bought his first brass tattoo machine for £7.10, and set up shop in Barry Island, South Wales, having initially practiced on his workmates at building sites. He’d specialise in motifs such as roses, skulls, swallows and panthers, and his first clients were mainly sailors from the Royal Navy and prostitutes (“pavement princesses”). “We’d use the same, unsterilized needle all week, and the same head chrome. By today’s standard that was totally crazy. And yet... when soldiers served in the British Army in India, they too would be tattooed by tattooists who never cleaned their stuff and tattooed with whatever was used to tattoo before.”

He has studied Japanese tattooing techniques in Japan and eventually settled in Plymouth with his wife, son and daughter, working in his studio at 92 Union Street, as immortalised in a Beryl Cook painting, listening to country music while he works (he’s a big Glen Campbell fan). He doesn’t know exactly how many tattoos he has – “I’ve never counted them” – but among them are ‘autographs’ from long gone well-known tattooists (“This is Les Skues... this is Cash Cooper from Piccadilly Circus...”).

Pain threshold can vary, he says, depending on the individual. “On a scale of one to ten, when it starts off it’s the shock of it, so that’s a six or seven. After a while it goes down to a two or something.” He can use a numbing cream, “but it gets in the hair”. A back tattoo might take between a year or two years – “the tolerance is three to four hours, and then the body starts to break down because it’s seriously uncomfortable.”

He thinks very few people think about the implications of a tattoo’s longevity: “I’ve never worked out the psychology of why somebody would want to get a tattoo. It’s a peculiar and human thing, isn’t it.” And in time, tattoos become “lovely memories... it’s your human history, your personal history of when you had it done.”

The oddest request Doc has ever had was to tattoo a man’s last will and testament on his back. “I didn’t tell him about the spelling mistakes either! I think he just wanted to do it because he had a funny sense of humour.”

And now, after 63 years, Britain’s most venerable skin artist is finally laying down his needle. Any work carried out after this will be for repairs only – and he’s performed plenty of those too, over the past seven decades. Naturally, some of those repair jobs will be the deletion, or rather transforming, of ex-partners’ names. “We’ve always considered ourselves to be in the love business,” says Doc. “We’re either putting the new love on or covering one up.”

4. Glenys Coope

<https://www.inkedmag.com/tattoos-3/badass-grandma-spends-pension-on-tattoos>

From *Inked Magazine*:

77-year-old Glenys “the Menace” Coope is not your ordinary old-age pensioner. She saves up her pension money so she can afford to get a new tattoo every few months.

Coope’s first set of tattoos started in the 1960s, where she got two hearts on her neck, two swallows on her hands, and a devil and a rose on her back in 1964. However her husband, Walter, had disapproved of her body art, so she removed them in 1985.

Walter has now passed, and the grandmother-of-five, and great-grandmother-of-three, has a tribute tattoo for him on her chest – a love heart with his name on it. But she’s also had sixteen more tattoos since his death. She sports an alien vampire and Medusa, and has her arms, chest and back tattooed.

"I've spent £2,000 but it's been worth every penny," Coope said. "I'm proud of them and I like them. I'll get a few more but I won't have loads. I want a werewolf on my back and then I'll leave it for a little bit."

The couple had been married for 54 years. Coope said, "After Walter died I felt that this was something I wanted to do for myself." Coope visits a local tattoo shop in Derby, England, called Octopus Tattoo Studio. Glenys’ sister, Pearl, was inspired to get her own tattoo after “seeing Glenys’ love affair with inkings.” Pearl, age 84, has a bee tattoo on her leg.

Glenys encourages all older folk to consider getting a tattoo. "I'd tell anyone thinking about getting one to go ahead and get one. It doesn't matter what other people think," she said. "I'm living life to its limits. I won't let my age put me down."

5. John Kenney

<https://www.inkedmag.com/tattoos-3/60-year-old-gangster>

From *Inked Magazine*:

A life of crime motivated John Kenney to tattoo every inch of his body, including his eyeballs; nose; and tongue, as a fierce act of self-loathing.

Kenney, 60, has tattooed his body as a constant reminder of a violent and turbulent life. That life began with leaving his destructive home at 7-years-old. “I didn't have a very good family life, there was no love there, just hidings from both parents and even my brothers because they wanted my girlfriend,” he said.

Kenney lived on the streets and suffered abuse. At age 12, he emptied milk bottles on doorsteps to get recycling money for drugs. Then he began breaking into homes before turning pimp. “Yes, you could call me a gangster, I ran drugs, imported them, sold them,” Kennedy said. “They couldn't control me.” Kenney became a drug mule and tattooed his face to “give him an identity.”

His life was a calamitous cycle of crime and Kenney became suicidal. His fascination with tattoos started when he was 18 years old. It would later bring on Hepatitis C from a dirty needle.

Kenney says his psychologist thinks his tattoos come from self-loathing. Kenney says he “just loves it. Maybe I've gone a bit too far, it is starting to look like I am inflicting pain on purpose,” he said. However, that hasn’t stopped him from continuing to ink his skin. “I've made friends and got an identity now that I’ve tattooed my face, everyone is curious,” he added.

Kenney says he regrets “half of his life, from the day I was born until I straightened myself.” He now focuses on the life he leads after straightening himself out. He has a permanent home in North Yorkshire, where he speaks to school students about the perils of drugs and dangers of unsafe tattooing. Kenney also advocates for the homeless.

Kenney’s tattoos don’t tell specific stories of specific times in his life, but they are all constant reminders to keep bettering himself.

6. Big Head, Big Mouth

<https://www.factswt.com/28-weird-tattoos-that-will-make-you-look-twice/>

https://www.afrizap.com/en/15-tattoos-you-cant-help-but-stare-at?doing_wp_cron=1605542794.8292460441589355468750

20 years ago, getting a simple tattoo on your arm was not appropriate. Things have changed. Today, the art of tattooing has become more than a simple fashion statement. Youngsters from all over the world inscribe on their bodies inspirational messages or pictures of their loved ones. Japan is one of the rare places where tattooing is still stigmatized because it is associated with the mafia. Most tattoos you will see are representations of hearts, stars, inspirational quotes or animals. Yet, a few “creative” people have decided to stand out and get tattoos that are out of the ordinary.

Tattoos are one of those body art modifications that have gotten accepted by society and are very popular among different people – from skaters and punk rockers to doctors and scientists. The stigma over tattooed people is lifted, and you can now work in a lot of places despite having visible ink on your skin. If you haven’t decided what kind of tattoo you want exactly and where you want it, it is going to be a hard time for you to choose, because the possibilities are endless — artists are getting more and more creative and the techniques used are very advanced. No matter if you just want to hide a scar, mark a memorable moment, or just want a certain realistic image for no particular reason – it can probably be done.

You can find loads of ideas on the Internet that could spark the right idea for your desired tattoo. You must think about it carefully – how big it should be and where it should be placed exactly. You can see for yourself that the right tattoo artist can transform any idea into a work of art.

EXERCISE THREE: Writing Poetry About Body Art

Look at the following poems:

Triangle Tattoo by Cheryl Dumesnil

The Wooden Overcoat by Rick Barot

Both poems can be found here:

<https://www.tweetspeakpoetry.com/2016/02/18/top-10-tattoo-poems/>

The Wooden Overcoat poem can also be found here, with some thoughts about it:

<http://thepoetrycooker.blogspot.com/2012/04/on-illusion-of-impermanence-wooden.html>

'This is an amazing piece because, in my opinion, it explains in perfect and illicit detail why difference in perspectives is one of the most beautiful things we have in our cognitive collective. That we each have our own way of looking at people and objects and moments - that gives these otherwise impermanent things the grace of eternity.'

Choose an image to work with.

- Write a sentence or two about why you chose this picture, how it makes you feel, what it makes you think about / stories / memories
- Next, write a description of details in the picture. Include words that indicate size, shape, colour, light/shade, objects, figures, positions etc.

- Finally, write a poem in response to your picture. If you need inspiration, look back at your answers above.

Remember, there are many different ways to go about this. Here are some further approaches:

- Write about the experience of looking at your chosen image.
- Write a poem about your own or someone else's tattoo/body art.
- Speculate about how or why the person has these tattoos.
- Write from the point of view of a tattoo – bring it to life and make it think and feel like a human being.
- Write a poem from the point of view of the person with tattoos and/or the tattooist.
- What is being revealed and/or concealed by the tattoos?
- Imagine what was happening while the tattooist was creating this work.
- Write about a tattoo you would like to have.

Your poem could be written in the form or style of one of the example poems (four-line verses / a philosophical poem (*The Wooden Overcoat*) / one continuous piece / telling a story (*Triangle Tattoo*).

And, of course, you can write your own poem in your own style!

© Sara-Jane Arbury

The Festival is grateful to Arts Council England the Garfield Weston Foundation Poetry and Pictures is a joint partnership with Herefordshire Mind.



Appendix 1

Who We Are

A 'Me-taphor' poem written by participants in Ledbury Poetry Festival's Poetry & Pictures workshop on Wednesday 18th November 2020

I am the wind, wild and blowing.

I am the wind busily sowing seeds.

I am a wide open field, I wear my heart on my sleeve.

I am a well-loved car, my seats sag in an old familiar way and my footwells are filled with books, magazines and old CDs that have lost their cases.

I am a spring morning filled with hope.

I am a coat rack hung with coats.

I am sunset across a seascape on a calm summer's evening.

I am a beaten up red Mini with cases of love letters spilling from the boot.

I am a deep sofa, inviting to companions.

I am a lump of tasty vintage cheddar.

I am a pile of toppling books.

I am a tatty comfy pair of shoes.

I am a thankful poet playing with ideas, images and words.

I am a cappuccino frothing on the surface as my deep dark alchemy burns beneath.

I am a tree with verdant foliage in an oak coppice.

I am a table, sturdy and strong.

I am the Koln Concert jaggedly repeating, pounding, stuck in your head.
I am a Western Isle with white talcum powder sand.
I am a plane, flying above the clouds.
I am a single scoop of ice-cream.
I am an adventurous camper van, a bit dilapidated but well loved.
I am the hole in the oak on the old King's Road.
I am a hammock strung between palm trees.
I am the red in the rose of the last rose he gave me
I am a wayward traffic signal blinking in all directions like an orchestral score.
I am an aged silver birch.
I am mother, wife, friend with no off button.
I am 6 o'clock in the morning, the time with only birds for company.
I am an oriental Lily, startling smooth silky sea colours, an eternal prism reflecting the light.
I am a sunflower following the light even on the darkest day.
I am a well-tuned classic car that occasionally goes off road.
I am a guinea pig running wild in lush grass.
I am vintage champagne, aged but still bubbly.

END DOCUMENT