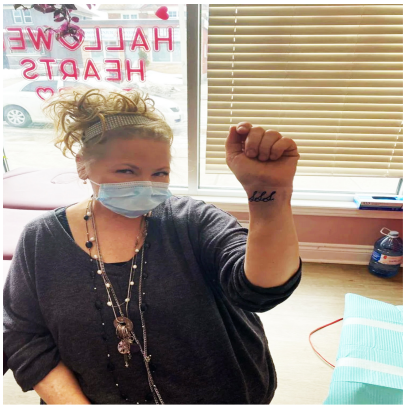

San Francisco women at mid-age and older find tattoos an eye-catching way to celebrate values, memories and independence

Description

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Cecile DeForestâ??s tattoo is a sacred, mystical syllable, vocalized in Buddhist and Hindu meditation.

Cecile DeForest never pictured herself sporting a tattoo, but when she changed her mind at 67, the San Francisco-based educator had no doubt what she wanted imprinted on the nape of her neck: Om.

DeForest is part of an eye-catching trend captivating women in their 50s and beyond. Theyâ??re flocking to tattoo parlors and decorating themselves with colorful skin illustrations. â??San Francisco is a tattoo mecca. Men have been more visible, but that is changing rapidly,â?• said Mary Joy Scott, one of the cityâ??s best-known and respected tattoo artists.

Scott knows what sheâ??s talking about: She gave her grandmother her first tattoo when the older woman was 87. She is now 96.

Tattoo artist Mary Joy Scott. (Photo courtesy of Pinterest.)

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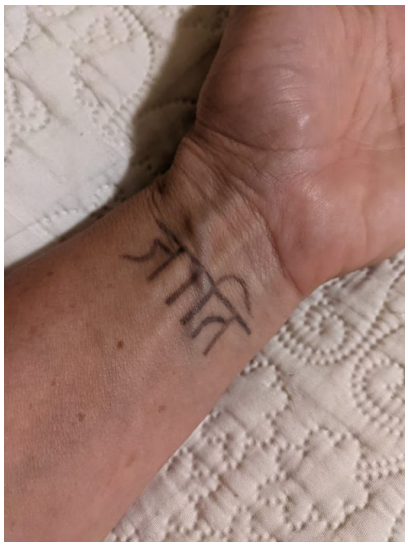
Tattoos are more common than you might think. According to a recent Harris poll, one in five U.S. adults has at least one tattoo, and women who donâ??t sport a tattoo are more likely to consider getting one than men.

â??I think that for older women, in particular, getting a tattoo is just another expression of their newfound independence and self-awareness,â?• writes Margaret Manning in her popular column, â?? sixtyandme.â?• â??Women over 60 have been around long enough not to worry about what other people think about them, and now we have the freedom to more fully express our creativity and passions in life.â?•

â??If you think youâ??re too old to get a tattoo, think again,â?• counsels â??Saved Tattoo,â?• a body art publication.

A recent study by Pew Research confirms that roughly 15 percent of American Baby Boomers â?? yes, that would be us â?? festoon themselves with body art. In the United States, 11 percent of those who have tattoos are from 50 to 64 years old._

A family bond



Millerâ??s tattoo, a symbol of rebirth, affirms her commitment to the soulâ??s evolution. (Photos courtesy of Jennifer Miller.)

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Jennifer Miller, whoâ??s approaching 50, acquired one â??because I was getting older, (I wanted) to point to and remember the layers of evolution in a soul.â?• and to remind me of my continued commitment to the concept of rebirth.â?•

Jennifer Miller, a freelance writer, editor and educator.

And yes, mature fans of body art have been duly cautioned about the combination of ink and age. â??From what Iâ??ve seen of tats over the years on different people, is they tend to hold up pretty well,â?• said author Talon Windwalker, who has acquired several. â??If theyâ??re on areas of skin that get pretty saggy, yeah it will warp a bit.â?•

Tattoos make for a kind of family bond for Wendy Ryder, 65, a registered nurse who does critical care transport. All her children and siblings have them. Hers is on her ankle, the most common spot for tattoos on womenâ??s bodies, experts say.

â??Mine isnâ??t flamboyant,â?• Ryder said. â??My sister had a big peacock feather around her neck. Got a job as a court reporter so that had to go. My husband got dates of dadâ??s birth and his passing.â?•

Getting that skin art was â??very liberating but hurt like hell. My kids were horrified,â?• she said.

Elizabeth Raybee. (Photo by John Frech.)

The upsurge in tattoos for older women mirrors the free-thinking ways of the â??60s generation, Ryder said. â??We are individuals who grew up in the 1960s where individualism and self-expression were a passion and way of life,â?• Ryder said. â??At every age and stage of life, our generation has been known for not being afraid to express ourselves.â?•

Born naked? We can fix that

Artist Elizabeth Raybee, 66, hadnâ??t seen many when she first walked into a tattoo parlor. One in particular captured her imagination. It was a star with an arrow going through it. Then she started seeing â??biker-yâ?• tattoos around town. Not her style.

But she loved the playful sensibility sheâ??d seen in the body art community â?? like the bumper sticker advertising a tattoo parlor that said, â??Born naked? We can fix that!â?• She started ruminating.

â??I thought, â??If I get a tattoo, itâ??s going to be one that I design.â??â?• she said. â??I was doing a lot of flying fish in my art in those days,â?• and the sea creatures that grace her shoulder blades feature wings outlined in purple, with the outlines of fish green, and wings a yellowish white.

Ringing her ankles are drawings of the four states she has lived in: Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, and California.

watermark
Jack Tipple. (Photo by Leah Marie Studios.)

Tattoos have always been a male proclivity, usually the province of younger men, paying homage to the biker life or military service.But now, weâ??re seeing older men, even some in their 70s, emulating their well-inked sisters.

Jack Tipple, 73, the co-editor and publisher of the Noe Valley Voice, started with a small rose on his right upper arm. â??It was somewhat impulsive,â?• he allows. â??I think my girlfriend had a butterfly.â?•

After seeing some impressive images on fellow runners in a 2014 race when he was 67, Tipple perused the universe of body art in Bay Area tattoo parlors before seeking the mentorship of Mary Joy Scott.

Tipple has an eagle emblazoned on his chest. â??The eagle was quite painful,â?• he said. â??Parts of a body are more sensitive than others. It was hard on Mary and me.â?• One solution: use a pain-numbing cream to take some of the sting out of the process, tattoo artists advise.

Test of courage

Tattoo artists place pigment into the skinâ??s dermis, spurring collagen growth that expedites the healing, which takes about two weeks.

DeForest was stunned by the pain of the ink and color needles penetrating her skin, and relieved to spot a restaurant across the street. An assistant was dispatched to fetch a glass of wine before each session.

â??It is most important to tell people itis painful,â?• said Scott, who frowns upon alcohol use during a session. The artist should strive to be efficient and fast, she said, adding that the most challenging clients are those who tend to wiggle during the procedure.

A new tattoo â??will change over time,â?• Scott warns clients. The end result â??can be very empowering. Youâ??ve gone through this test of courage.â?• The change is part of the charm of a tattoo, she said.

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Sandy Bloosâ?? tattoo comprises her initial, that of her daughter, Sophie, and her youngest sister, Susan, who died in 2020. (Photo courtesy of Sandy Bloos.)

Tattooists keep portfolios of their work, and clients, no matter their age, should peruse them before making a decision, Ryder said. â??If they regret it, thereâ??s a nice little machine that can take it off.â?•

In fact, many clients who have become disenchanted with their tattoos do so because they involve the names of others. For that reason, artists discourage clients from dedicating a tattoo to another person â?? or even to a belief system from which the client may become estranged.

Sandy Bloos got her first tattoo at 60 â?? three upper case, cursive Sâ??s. Her daughter Sophie, who is 28 and has several tattoos, came up with the idea and got the same image tattooed on her wrist. â??We did this to honor my youngest sister, Susan, who passed in November 2020,â?• Bloos said. â??We had the privilege of being with her and loving her as she transitioned.

â??Susan, and Sophie and I were extremely close,â?• she said. â??We were called â??The three Sâ??sâ?•, and we did so much together. We miss her very much, but we smile and feel her love when we see those letters.â?•

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1. All Posts

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