The History of Body Art

Tattoos, Body Piercings, Scarification, Branding, and Implants
History of Tattoos

No one can really say when history of tattoos began.

The oldest known tattoo was discovered in 1991. It was found on a mummy known as Oetzi, an iceman found on the Italian & Austrian Alps dated to be at least 5,300 years old.

The most common idea is that tattoos were done for medicinal purposes, social status, ritual markings or just simple preference.

Tattooing in the Western world today has its origins in Polynesia, with the discovery of Tattau by eighteenth century explorers, which became popular among European sailors.
United States History of Tattoos

- In 1769 Captain James Cook traveled to Tahiti to observe skin marking customs to the natives.
- A German immigrant Martin Hilderbrandt got the honor of the first professional tattooist in the United States; he tattooed soldiers on both sides of the Civil War.
- In 1891 the first patented electric tattoo machine was issued to a Irish tattooist Samuel O’Reilly.
It is estimated that by the end of the 19th century 90% of American sailors had tattoos. The most popular tattoo in the military has sentimental roots; a heart tattoo with a ribbon inscribed with MOM.
Tattoos: In the Past

In the past, tattoos had little acceptance of the American public, but it was difficult to express too much negativity when military personnel would return home from serving overseas with the names of loved ones emblazoned on their arm.

To most Americans during this time period, the word “tattoo” was synonymous for those outside the mainstream of America. It was a mind set of undesirables from gang members like the Hells Angles, Bandidos, to the movie Easy Rider.
It was not until the 1980’s that tattoos began to gain positive exposure, with the help of Long Island based band “The Stray Cats”, featured on the cover of the Rolling Stone magazine. As tattoos ceased to be solely connected to counter-culture, they started to appear on average Americans across the United States. Tattoo shops sprung up all across America. In most parts of the United States tattoos are common and considered to be a basic form of self-expression.
History of Body Piercing

Body piercing has been practiced all over the world since ancient times. The same mummy, mentioned in tattooing has pierced ears to opening of 7-11 mm gauge.

In Europe between the 4th & 16th centuries, piercing was not as prominent because of styles in clothing and length of hair obscuring women’s ears.

Nose piercing has a long history dating back to 1500 BC. Believed to be introduced by nomadic tribes to the Mughal emperors of the middle east, it remains customary today for Indian Hindu women of childbearing age, to wear a nose ring.
Growing Popularity in the West

Body piercing was popularized in the United States by a group of Californians including Malloy and Jim Ward. In 1978 the Wards opened the first professional body piercing shop in west Hollywood.

Body modification became more popular in the United States in the 1990’s.
Tapering — The most common professional technique used for stretching piercings. It is a lubricated rod that is pushed through the fistula until the widest part of the taper is level with the skin surrounding the piercing. Larger jewelry is then pushed through the opening.
Body Scarification

Body scarification/carving is a lot like wood carving. An artist takes a piece of wood and with small knives they cut off little pieces from the block. Instead of working on wood the artist works on human skin.
Branding is another popular way of body scarification. Here the knife is replaced by a laser that cuts a design to surgical precision. This is a very expensive procedure so many artists today simply use a primitive tool known since the middle ages (a piece of hot metal heated to 500°F).
Implants

- Implants are created by placing an object under the skin to make a design. It's a pretty simple procedure: an incision is made near the area the implant will be placed, then a pocket is made and the object is inserted.
- The incision is then stitched up and it's all done.
- The most commonly used materials are titanium, soft solid silicone, and Teflon. Other materials such as stainless steel can be used, some people can develop an allergic reaction and reject the implant.