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Tattoos

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Tattoos are a form of body art dating to the fourth millennium B.C.E., in which ink is inserted under the skin to change its pigment. In the twenty-first century, have become an increasingly popular form of expressive culture. After its re-introduction in Europe in the eighteenth century, tattooing has experienced oscillating periods of social prejudice and tolerance. But by the early 2000s, this form of body modification had lost much of its stigma, becoming a mainstream form of expressive culture practice in North America and Western Europe. In this context, chefs have taken to tattooing with particular gusto. The popularity of food culture and the ascent of chefs to stardom have, by association, given rise to a noticeable increase in food-related tattoos. It should be no surprise, then, that cheese-lovers have become keen followers of the practice as well.

Whereas some chefs choose to have their signature dishes inscribed on their skin, cheesemongers and aficionados select cheese-related iconography as an identifier and a sign of their personal commitment to cheese. So pervasive has this become that Culture Magazine featured a photo spread of cheese tattoos in its June 2011 issue (“Body of Work”). In the profile, we see that the cheesemonger Sheri La Vigne commemorates her lifelong dream of owning a cheese shop with a “sacred wedge” of cheese tattooed on her left arm. Having pledged her commitment by captioning her tattoo, “Cheese for life,” she quips, “No turning back now!”

The author and cheesemonger Gordon Edgar puts it this way: “I decided that no matter what happened in the rest of my life, my relationship with cheese—professional and personal—was significant enough to merit a permanent mark on my body.” (“Body of Work,” 2011).
The most popular cheese-themed tattoo image is a wedge of hard cheese, sometimes enhanced by blue veins or the “eyes” of a Swiss-style cheese. Other popular tattoos represent foods featuring cheese as the core ingredient: pizza slices, cheese melts, tacos, and cheeseburgers. Among professionals, cheesemongers’ knives with their distinctive culinary history and unique shapes have become an aesthetically and symbolically appealing image. Dave Puchta says of his tattoo, a trio of cheese knives: “The traditional Parmigiano-Reggiano knives are a representation of the heritage that’s developed with cheese during its thousands of years of existence.” (“Body of Work,” 2011).

Cows, mice, and even the word “milk” are also make for popular in cheese-related tattoos. Perhaps the ultimate expression of one aficionado’s love of cheese, though—and, perhaps, brand loyalty as well—is the tattooed image of the Parmigiano-Reggiano D.O.P. stamp. Perhaps the ultimate expression of one aficionado’s love of cheese, though—and, perhaps, brand loyalty as well—is the tattooed image of the Parmigiano-Reggiano D.O.P. stamp. Paula Arvela