

TATTOO

FACT SHEETS

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Tattoo Machine

The tattoo machine was invented by Samuel O'Reilly in 1891 (NYC) who took Thomas Edison's invention of an engraving machine and altered it for tattooing. The principle of the machine is the same as the manual practice, but the machine can vibrate the needles to prick the skin approximately 50 times a second. The invention of the electric tattoo machine is considered one of the greatest advancements in tattooing because it speeded up the tattooing process, which allowed tattoo artists to ink more people and make a better living wage. Some of the parts of the machine include the needles (to prick the skin), coil (electricity flows through it to power the machine), grip (to hold the machine), tubes (guide the ink into the skin), and a clip cord (wire that connects to the power supply). All of the machine parts have to be finely tuned to run efficiently. There are other parts of the tattoo machine, but the list is too long to include on this fact sheet. Talk with your tattoo artist to find out about how the parts all fit together and how it works.



Many artists will feel insulted if you call a tattoo machine a "gun"

Prior to the introduction of the electric tattoo machine, tattooing was done using needles from bones, animal teeth and other materials. The needles were attached to a stick or pole, dunked in ink and tapped into the skin. The art of traditional tattooing is still practiced today by some artists and societies.



A Samoan tattooist (left), Tufuga ta tatou and assistant (right), carrying out a traditional tattoo on a man's back. The tattooist uses traditional tools.

