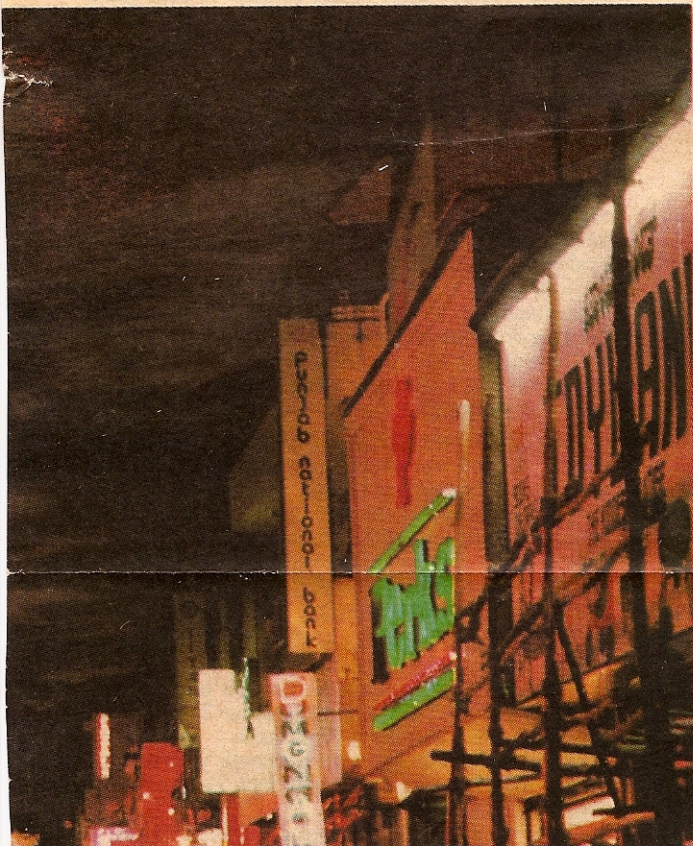


September 12, 1993

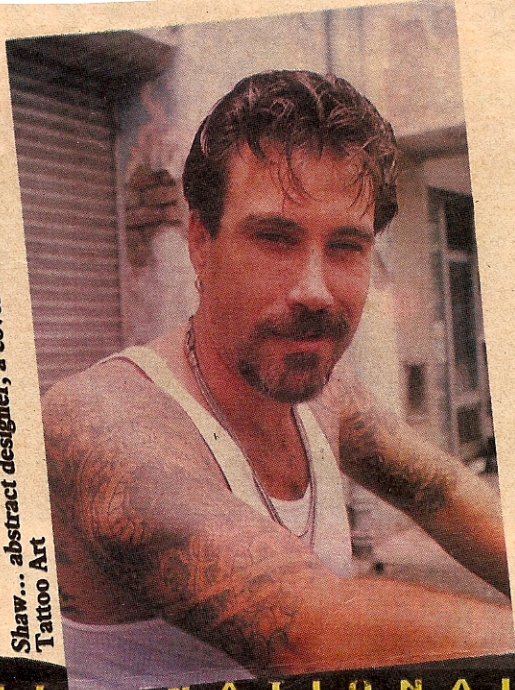
DYE HARD: The Tattoo Man
comes to town... **II**

FLYING SOLO: At the controls of
the Boeing 747-400... **XXIV**



MUSHTAQ AHMED

Shaw... abstract designer; a cover of International
Tattoo Art



INTERNATIONAL TATTOO ART

WHAM, BAM, AMSTERDAM!

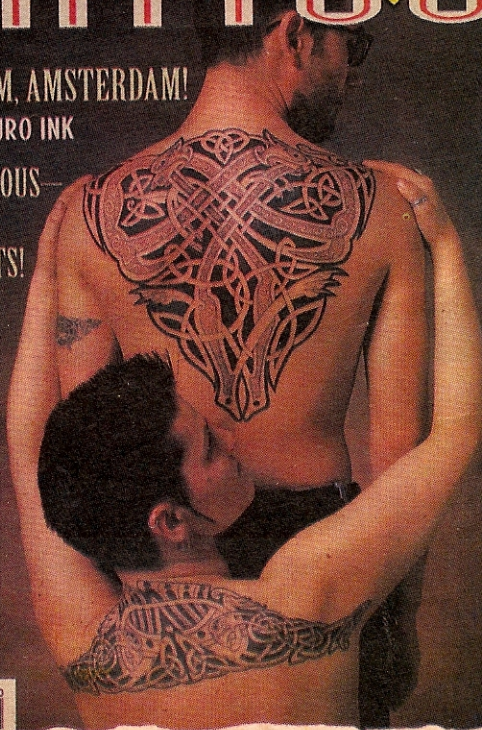
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His artistic creations are skin deep. And Jonathan Shaw's magazine showcases his obsession

By ERVELL E MENEZES

REMEMBER *THE Illustrated Man*? That late '60s film which had hero Rod Steiger with tattoos all over his body.

Or more recently *Cape Fear* with Robert De Niro heavily tattooed which led an onlooker to remark, "Don't know whether to look at him or read him."

True they were paintings for film purposes but tattooing is among the most primitive art forms found everywhere in the world, except Africa because of dark skins.

"Why, even Egyptian mummies were heavily tattooed," says the 40-year-old Jonathan Shaw a Brazilian living in New York and editing *International Tattoo Art* a magazine which devotes itself entirely to this subject.

Jonathan has been a tattoo artiste for the last 17 years having taken his surname Shaw from his guru Bob Shaw who died earlier this year.

No, he does not like to go back to his original Brazilian name, at most he reveals his surname was Da Silva. But he spent all of August in Gujarat where there is a great deal of tribal tattooing.

"Tattooing is a very important part of any culture," says Jonathan. "It is a widespread art form but ignored because of social preconceptions and class values."

"It is society that makes it a stigma," he concedes but points out that in certain other societies, "not being tattooed is also a stigma."

On a quick round of Bombay recently, Jonathan nonetheless noticed the vegetable vendors at Colaba market and the tattoos on their hands.

"One in three Indians are tattooed. The poor ones even tattoo the *bindi* on their heads," says Jonathan expertly and feels it is absurd for urban Indians to go in for tattoos based on Western iconography when there is so much of Indian and tribal iconography.

There are tattoo artistes in New York who specialise in Indian iconography, Jonathan points out. In his publication he shows pictures of the Ganesh idol done by Filip Leu of Fun City Studio, New York or Tux Ferrar of Tux Electric Studio, Brooklyn Park, MD.

Filip Leu comes down to Goa each year to do his tattooing, says Jonathan. *International Tattoo Art* is full of exotic varieties of tattoos.

There's a dinosaur-like creature (much before *Jurassic*

DYE HARD

Park) in colour and a back replete with elephants, bison and giraffes, a complete African safari.

There are demons in black and white and all kinds of esoteric designs. Why Jonathan himself has an abstract design (in colour) which starts on his forearms and goes on to his chest.

I wasn't curious enough to see, if like Rod Steiger in *The Illustrated Man* it went all over his body.

"The tattoo took him three years. Not three years of everyday work but one day in a week. I was in no hurry," he points out.

Ask him about the colours in his tattoo and how it is done and he'll side step the question. "Don't go in detail, it's too technical. It's like painting, not printing. But instead of a brush we use needles," he explains.

Or else he wouldn't be staying in New York. It is the world's most competitive city and not the friendliest.

But the dictionary definition of tattooing he readily gives like "piercing the surface of the skin with a pin or a series of needles or other sharp objects. Jonathan mentions in some primitive cultures sharpened fish bones are used, sharp objects dipped in ink or pigment dyes.

"Tattooing is certainly on the increase," says Jonathan and here musicians are among the most indulgent. He's tattooed music groups like The Cure and Vanilla Ice.

Among the film stars, there's Johnny Depp of *Edward Scissorhands*

fame and Cher and he has acted in *Tightrope* opposite Clint Eastwood. He knew author Ray Bradbury's daughter. "Why, just switch on MTV and you'll see tattoos are screaming at you," he says.

Jonathan agrees that like the extinction of species of animals and birds, tattooing is one of the lost folk arts. If it is not pursued people will be losing their cultural roots.

He cites an example of Kutchis watching American films on TV. "The result will be that the children will not be getting tattooed in these places," he elucidates.

But Jonathan is happy that tattooing is going global the world over. It has always been an obsession with him.

"It is my vantage point with the world," he goes on modestly and feels it will only die with him. The magazine doesn't take much of his time but it is as a tattoo artist that he spends most of his time.

And yet, Jonathan has no formal education. "I came from the streets of Rio, dropped out of Class IX, was a sea

man for years. But I have read extensively at least two to four books a week, on history, art, sociology, biography, fiction, non-fiction, almost everything." He says nothing of his travels with his anthropologist wife, Vera.

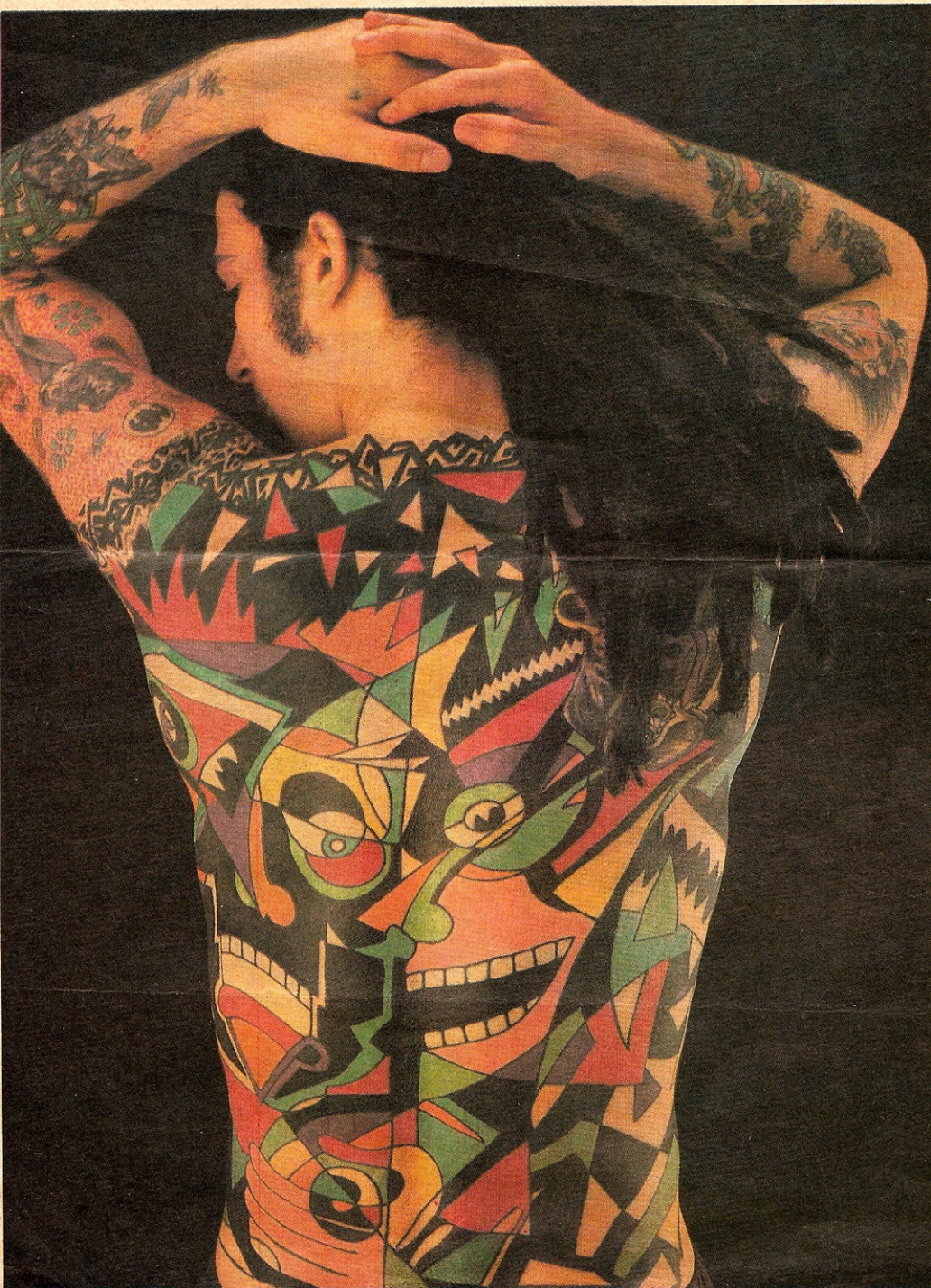
But then New York is full of self-made men like Jonathan, and that's why the United States is called the land of opportunity.

Ironically, however, it's hard to get under Jonathan's skin.



Pin point... Shaw and Depp

PASSING THRO'



His art... multi-dimensional