

It's not actually a tattoo. It's a kind of pillow made of stuffed Pleather in the shape of a tattoo.

Pleather?

Fake leather made from some kind of plastic.

That's funny.

Why is it funny?

Because it used to be that having a tattoo meant you were a real warrior, pirate, convict or outlaw gang member. Definitely not fake.

And now?

Now that tattoos are so popular, people who are not real warriors or outlaws sport them.

You could say that a tribal tattoo on a law-abiding, middle class college student is a fake. It's a real tattoo but on such a person it's false advertising.

Real and fake at the same time.

Like pleather is fake leather but real pleather.

So would you call leather fake pleather?

No, because real leather isn't pretending to be anything but what it is.

This particular design is known as a "tramp stamp." It goes across a woman's lower back, just above the butt cheeks. It's very popular.

Sexy.

Yes. It suggests that the person with such a tattoo is sexually adventurous: a tramp, like in the song, "The Lady is a Tramp."

I suppose that for at least some tramp-stamped people it's truthful advertising.

And for others?

A fashion statement.

It occurs to me that a tattoo isn't a tattoo until it's been inked into someone's skin.

And before that?

A disembodied image, a Platonic archetype.

Platonic?

Plato thought that ultimate reality – ultimately perfect reality -- consisted of ideal forms, or archetypes, in a realm transcending the material world. To produce what we take for ordinary reality, these archetypes descend into and give form to matter, which is physical stuff.

So the archetypal tattoo descends into ink and skin and becomes, for us, real.

Here it seems like the archetype took a wrong turn and got materialized as a pillow.

It's like something you might encounter in a joke shop.

But here it's a work of art.

What's the difference?

It's not what is the difference, but where is the difference?

So where is it?

In your mind.



Al Freeman, "Soft Tribal Tattoo" (2018), pleather and polyester fill, 27" x 56" x 4"