

# Death & Rebirth: **The ART** of SUNNY B u i c k



**By Sherri Cullison**

Some people view death as a release from a past where purpose has been fulfilled. This death eventually leads to a future peace and happiness that is viewed as the allegorical rebirth. Death can be in the physical or in the spiritual as a symbol of physical transition.

San Francisco tattooist and artist Sunny Buick has been exploring her spirituality for the past two years, and much of her art deals with the celebration of both life and death. She spends some of her spare time reading about Mexican and Tibetan cultures, not only to gain influence for her art, but also to learn about their different quests for spirituality, their desires to understand death, and, thereby, celebrate life.

Sunny characterized the first year she spent researching and developing her own spirituality as one of the best years of her life. And with the joy that she found within herself also came great change in her physical life.

Sunny had worked nearly six

years for veteran tattooer, Henry Goldfield at Goldfield's Tattoo in the historic beatnik section of San Francisco: North Beach.

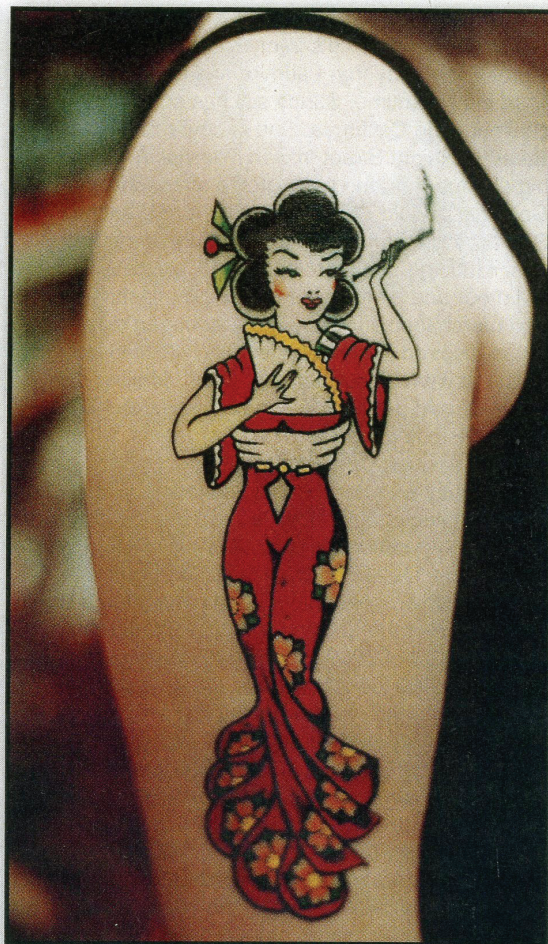
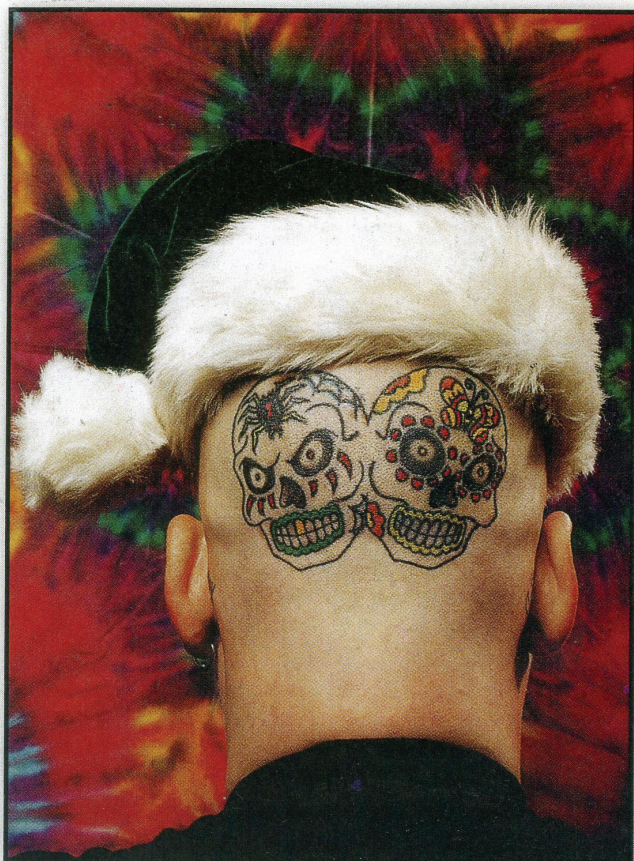
Last year, Henry let her go. Sunny can look at the death of her career at Goldfield's as symbolizing the fulfillment of her purpose there. She has moved on, although she admits that it's been a difficult adjustment. "It's still pretty emotional, he's like a father to me," she said. "I'd never worked in a job that long."

But with the death of that job must come a rebirth. Sunny is rebuilding who she is. She took her first trip to Paris last year. "I had this gut instinct and fear that I was going to fall in love with it and not want to come back. Of course I was right," she said. "I came back, and I was talking a lot to the guys I was working with about wanting to move there. I was talking about it because I felt like I couldn't hide it from Henry. He was really excited about it. He kept saying 'You have to go now. If you don't go now, you'll never go.'"

Sunny is planning to live there someday. Despite all of the huge goals she has set for herself in the States, she considers her next big hurdle to be the move to Paris. "I never had formal art history training,









which is another reason I'd like to spend some time in Paris," Sunny said. "It's in my roots as an artist to be there. Everybody that I admire has lived there."

In the meantime, Sunny still has some pretty hefty challenges in California. She is now working for Cold Steel on Haight Street in San Francisco, which is a big change from the homegrown atmosphere of Goldfield's. Cold Steel is a studio with branches in San Francisco and London. Not only does Cold Steel offer tattooing and piercing, but it's also a distributor of tattoo- and piercing-related books, flash, T-shirts and merchandise. Sunny recently began creating tattoo-inspired designs for jewelry, which is being sold online at [www.classichardware.com](http://www.classichardware.com). Making this move toward product design has motivated Sunny to begin designing her own line of products, which she can sell through Cold Steel.

Still busy with her tattooing schedule, Sunny has also continued painting while reaching the completion of her biggest endeavor yet: curating a Sci-Fi/Western art show at 111 Minna Gallery in San Francisco.

The last two years have been consumed with taking care of the details for this event, which opened January 23rd of 2003. Sunny gathered works from more than 100 lowbrow artists, and she published a catalog of the art featured in the show. "I think the idea for the book came out of my respect and admiration for Ed Hardy and his publishing," she said. "I have also always been a total book lover since I was a little girl. I always had this instinct that if you're in print, you're immortal."

Sunny is now waiting to see what kind of ripple effect will occur from curating the show. She isn't sure how her life will change, but she says that the show inspired tons of ideas for spin-off projects. "People have more ideas; they want to do short films," she said. "I want to do another big painting with the same theme, and I think it would be really cool to build a web site. This show was a five-year project. I'm not sure that I am ready to put it down."

"Sci-fi/Western is America's fantasy about her past and her future," Sunny said. "We get distracted by our pasts and futures, but when you sit down to do an image you're in the present, while the image is revealing your fears about the future or the haunting of your past."

The ghosts of Sunny's past are still very much with her, but she has learned through her spirituality to deal with life's changes in order to grow. As for her future, it remains to be seen where she'll end up. "When I came back from Paris, I thought I'd have to play it really smart and maybe have a three-year stretch where I would go and spend a month in Paris every year to develop a clientele. Then it became this stronger and stronger obsession. I felt like my heart was breaking that I wasn't there," she said. "At the same time, I have to wait and see what happens here. I'm comfortable with just seeing how things go. You can make plans, but then life happens."

Sunny Buick can be reached through her web site, [www.sunnybuick.com](http://www.sunnybuick.com).





