Art for Healing and Redefining Self

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While entertainment value and artistic expression come to mind first when the fine and performing arts are mentioned, they have a significant place in healing.

Art therapy helps both civilians and service members. The Post covered one such project at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Painting papier-maché masks offers relief and opens communication. We have included two handouts to accompany this article — a guide to mask-making and background on cultural uses of masks.

“Leaving Indelible Marks” reveals what ballet dancers with tattoos do to conceal them when they are performing. A bit of chemistry and make-up magic mix, especially preparing for classical ballets.

Science and the arts also interact to redefine how individuals create art and confront disabilities. Once only found in CADD labs, 3-D drawings and sculptures are available to students in local libraries and in their homes. Drawings transform to 3-D sculptures and models using pens. From pens to prosthetics art heals and redefines our ideas.
Giving their pain a face

BY MICHAEL ALISON CHANDLER

- Originally Published December 5, 2016

Chris Stowe worked on a bomb squad during six deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between tours he sought help for the headaches, anxiety, memory loss and other symptoms of trauma and brain injuries he suffered while being exposed to hundreds of blasts.

He tried talk therapy, medication and a self-prescribed regimen of yoga and meditation, before finding some relief in an unexpected form: a white papier-mâché mask.

During an art therapy session at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, he picked up a brush and painted something he had never been able to satisfactorily describe: how he felt.

His mask showed two sides of himself: the calm exterior side-by-side with a monster beneath, filled with rage, his eyes and mouth brimming with bees.

“If you imagine what a bees’ nest sounds like, the buzzing, almost surround sound,” he said. “This is how my head feels.”

Nearly 350,000 U.S. service members have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries since 2001, according to the Defense Department. Thanks to modern body armor and military vehicles, many service members survive roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices, only to come home struggling to function.

The invisible wounds of war can be difficult to diagnose and treat. But the military is finding that art, and mask-making in particular, can spur the healing process.

Art therapy, along with music and creative writing, are integral parts
of treatment at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed in Bethesda which opened in 2010 to study and treat traumatic brain injury and the psychological conditions that often accompany it. The therapeutic arts program has shown promising results and is expected to expand to 12 military sites around the country by 2017, through a partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. Congress appropriated $1.9 million this year to fund this military “healing arts” network.

Two dozen active service members come through each month for an intensive, four-week outpatient treatment program. During the first week, art therapist Melissa Walker gives each service member a blank mask. She invites them to explore their identities or emotions surrounding their injuries or treatment as they decorate it.

“There is something powerful in the mask,” Walker said. “It literally and figuratively encompasses the areas we are focused on here, both the physical and psychological.”

**Creating a ‘safe space’**

What starts as a two-hour activity often extends beyond the first session, as service members return to the studio to keep working on their masks.

Brain injuries and trauma can actually impair verbal communication, research shows, but making art can help, particularly when it comes to processing traumatic memories. Brain scans show that when someone attempts to recall a traumatic event, the left frontal cortex of the brain — the area responsible for speech and language — stays dark, while the parts of the brain that control emotion and the senses light up.

Art-making activates these same emotional and sensory areas of the brain. The job of the art therapist is to create a safe space for service members to tap into those difficult memories, and then to help them describe what they have created, opening a neural pathway that had previously been shut off.

Walker was inspired to work with veterans because her grandfather, a Korean War veteran, spent his life struggling with trauma. Shrapnel pierced his neck during one of the final battles of the war, and he fell facedown in the mud. Unable to call out, he was initially left for dead. But he was eventually discovered and sent to a military hospital in Japan.

He recovered physically, but

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Former Navy SEAL and Walter Reed patient Rusty Noesner holds his mask, which shows the conflicted sense of self he felt while serving.
the trauma followed him. Walker remembers her grandfather as short-fused and easily startled. He never spoke about his war experiences, even to his wife whom he met in the hospital during his initial recovery. But sometimes he had nightmares. Walker recalls a summer visit to her grandparents’ house when she was a little girl, waking to hear him shouting obscenities in the middle of the night.

Her grandfather died while she was in graduate school. Since then, she has built a career trying to help other soldiers process their experiences so they aren’t trapped by them.

The masks’ many messages

In the six years since the center opened, Walker has indexed more than 1,000 masks that soldiers have created and she has begun analyzing their themes.

Many masks depict physical pain (bloodshot eyes or a knife stabbing the forehead); some show literal injuries (shards of shrapnel in the face and a piece of skull surgically removed to relieve pressure in the brain). Others are metaphorical — one mask depicts a soldier’s confused thoughts as a swarm of flies coupled with a pair of chopsticks trying to capture them.

Some explore their military and national identities. Patriotism is a point of pride and an instrument of suffering, as seen in a mask that shows two small flags propped up next to the eyes as blinders.

Some show hope and healing: A Navy nurse decorated half of her mask with sand and a large eye, representing an injury that impaired her vision, while the other side is a globe that represents a future career path in international health.

One of Walker’s patients was a senior-level service member who had been haunted by the image of a bloody face for seven years after a particularly difficult deployment, in which he suffered a concussion in mortar fire and he lost a close friend in a convoy to an improvised explosive device. He was supposed to be on the convoy; his friend had gone in his place.

For years he tried to avoid the feelings of guilt and hopelessness, but the image of the bloody face continued to haunt him. In Walker’s studio, instead of ignoring it, he made a likeness of the face. His mask was blood red with bulging eyes. In the process of making it, he began talking about it. When he was done with the mask, he put it in a box and put a lid on it. He left it for Walker to take care of.

Walker keeps it on a shelf in her studio. A year later, the soldier reported that the ghoulish visits had almost completely stopped.

Many soldiers leave their masks and memories behind. Walker's studio is now filled with them. They adorn the entrance to her studio, and the front lobby of the center.

Using the art to help navigate life after war

Some patients leave and take their masks home, a new outlet for their stress or pain.

Rusty Noesner, a former Navy SEAL, came to the center four years ago after he suffered brain injuries after falling out of a helicopter and during a blast in Kandahar.

He immediately gravitated to the art studio, he said. He created a mask that showed two sides of his personality, with a combat scene and a nature scene.

“No one wants to accept you have these emotions, this vulnerable side. ... You don’t want to have those things in combat,” he said. “But when you get home you have to reconnect so you can move on with your life.”

Noesner, 32, is out of the military and running a nonprofit group called War Paints, based in Harrisonburg, Va., that encourages veterans and service members to pursue art and tap into the part of the brain they abandoned while at war. They can sell their artwork on his website.

For the 41-year-old Stowe, years of talk therapy had not been very helpful. It was hard to sit down again and again. But with art, he did not worry about judgment, he said, and felt more in control of his emotions.

Retired from the Marines after 23 years, Stowe lives in Tampa and has a civilian job at U.S. Central Command. He has good days and bad days, he said. Some days he still hears the bees buzzing in his head.

“Those are the days that I paint,” he said. He makes oil paintings at an in-home studio or goes out to the porch with his ukulele. Sometimes he escapes to a glass blowing studio for a few hours.

“It’s really cathartic,” he said. “Whatever I was battling, it slowly fades away.”

Art That Heals

1. Before reading “Giving their pain a face” by Washington Post reporter Michael Alison Chandler, review the meaning of the following terms.
   - Cathartic
   - Cognitive
   - Neural pathway
   - Psychological conditions
   - Sensory-motor areas
   - Therapeutic arts
   - Trauma
   - Traumatic brain injury
   - Verbal communication

2. When one joins military service, one is leaving the civilian sector to be a government employee. Pay and benefits are provided through U.S. government departments and agencies, including the Defense Department and Veterans Administration. In this article, Michael Alison Chandler refers to centers and resources. 
   Do an Internet search to get background on each of the following:
   A. National Intrepid Center of Excellence
   B. National Endowment for the Arts
   C. Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

3. Who or what influenced Melissa Walker’s career path?

4. “There is something powerful in the mask,” art therapist Melissa Walker said. “It literally and figuratively encompasses the areas we are focused on here, both the physical and psychological.”
   Explain what she means. In your response include the work and words of one of her clients.

5. Art therapy as defined by the American Art Therapy Association:
   Art therapy is an integrative mental health profession that combines knowledge and understanding of human development and psychological theories and techniques with visual arts and the creative process to provide a unique approach for helping clients improve psychological health, cognitive abilities, and sensory-motor functions. Art therapists use art media, and often the verbal processing of produced imagery, to help people resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.
   Give examples from The Post article of the work of the art therapist.

6. Masks created by soldiers have been categorized. Select two of the categories to explain the distinctive qualities both exhibit.

7. Some soldiers leave the masks they created behind. Others take them home. What does this decision often reflect?

8. According to Chris Stowe, what are the benefits of art therapy? In addition to mask making, what other forms of art therapy does he use?
What is a mask? A mask is an object, generally round or oblong, 2-dimensional, that covers the face. From ancient times, masks have been used for many purposes. They have been used for ceremonial, protective, practical reasons and to disguise and entertain.

Modern uses of masks can be seen in sports arenas, medical environments, fashion design and for occupational hazard protection.

From where did the word “mask” originate? The Italian word maschera means a “mask” or “disguise.” It derives from Medieval Latin mascara which means “nightmare” or “ghost.”

Another variation means “knit” or “twist” which refers to wearing mesh netting over the face to filter air. The meanings suggest to cover, hide, guard or transform.

Think of some places where masks have been used from antiquity to today. You might research cultures of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Oceania and The Americas (north, south and the Caribbean). Basically, everywhere.

Surely, you have seen masks wherever you go. If you have an miner operation, your doctor and nurses will wear surgical masks.

If you go snorkling, you’ll wear a swim mask. If you go to carnival in New Orleans, Brazil or Venice, there will be masks worn by the entertainers.

Back in the days of Aeschylus, an ancient Greek playwright, his actors wore full-faced comedy and tragedy masks. In merry old 16th/17th century England, the entertainment for the ruling class was pantomime and dancing. They were masked performers. In Oceania, masks were used in religious ceremonies and sorcery for protection from bad spirits.

In North America, Arctic coastal groups used masks for good luck in the hunt of animals.

Masks emerged in pre-Hispanic America and Latin America very early; for example, when paying respect to the dead. After the Spanish arrived, masks were seen in carnivals for dancing and celebrating Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday.

Many African masks were carved by masters, who were well-respected. Animals were depicted as were humans and the ancestors. In China, Indonesia and India, masks were connected to the divinities, making contact with the ancestors, and insuring good luck in wedding ceremonies.

Masks could be made of leather, wood, fabric, copper, gold, silver and clay.

All the basics of painting and design apply. A mask can be painted or even collaged using beads, patterns, feathers, string, sequins, fabric, buttons, gold or silver leaf paint.

Art therapists use masks to enable returning war veterans to express their inner feelings visually rather than verbally. Masks can show how a person feels by colors of paint — warm or cool or hot or cold. Line weight can vary with intensity. Tonal values (tints or hues) show saturation of colors which can be softer or more intense.
Examples of Ancient and Modern Masks

PHOTOS FROM LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.GOV

**Title: Ceramic mask**
Mexico
*Contributor*
1896-1942, Tina Modotti photographer

Created 1920-1930
Published [ca. 1925]

**Title: Tutankhamun’s mask**
Egypt. Cairo. King
*Contributor*
Matson Photo Service, photographer

**Title: Mask at the Kultur House** in tiny Helvetia, once a Swiss colony in Randolph County, West Virginia.
*Contributor*
Carol M. Highsmith, 1946-, photographer

**Title: Woman, seated with lyre, thespian’s mask, and cupid**
*Contributor*
Ferd. Mayer & Sons Mammoth Lith. Print
c1870 Posters: Performing Arts Posters

**Title: Mardi Gras mask**
New Orleans, Louisiana
*Contributor*
Carol M. Highsmith, 1946-, photographer

**Title: Indian Court**
Federal Building, Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco

Featuring 1939 Eskimo mask western Alaska/Siegriest

**Title: Look behind the mask! Communism is death.** From Lenin to Stalin ... the word is one thing, the fact another

Mask of Stalin and head of skeleton.

**Title: Delegates wearing Jimmy Carter smile masks**
at the Democratic National Convention, New York City, 1976
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How to Create A Mask

Fun or serious masks can be made by several methods. Many artists and students use the papier-maché method, which is fun, but a bit more messy.

These are two simpler ways to get great results!

It is a good idea to decide what the theme of your mask will be. An emotion, two sides of you, celebration? Sketch out your ideas on plain paper before you draw lightly on the surface of your chosen ground, a canvas, paper or wooden support for the paint and glue.

To preserve your mask, paint a coat of clear gesso or some kind of sealant over the front. This will protect your mask from wear and tear.

Suggested Materials

►Blank, white mask. Purchase pre-made, unpainted from a crafts or party goods store. Male or female. Or get a plain white paper plate to draw your own design.

►HB pencil, black marker, string, safety scissors, paper towels

►Three brushes, nos. 8, 10 and 12: two for painting details; one for covering larger surfaces

►Poster paint with good range of colors.

►Old newspaper or plastic sheeting to protect table

►Glue (white school glue that has good tactile strength and non-poisonous)

►Gather your decorative elements to adhere after you’ve painted your design. Elements are beads, sparkles, string, fabric or an interesting item to adhere.

Think out your ideas first on scrap paper before you paint onto mask.

Cut out areas for ears, eyes, nose and mouth. A nose can be taped from the back to make the mask more dimensional. Use knotted string in small holes in both sides to tie behind head.
Doodlers, this may be your chance to take your creations up a notch. Meet CreoPop, a pen that lets you make 3-D drawings — really, little sculptures — completely from scratch.

The pen works its magic by using a special kind of polymer that cures immediately on contact with light. As you draw in the air and squeeze the toothpaste-like ink out of the pen, it hardens to form your small sculptures.

In one week, CreoPop’s maker has outstripped the $40,000 goal it set for a month-long campaign, raising over $67,000 so far. Backers can buy pen sets, which start at $79 and come with five ink cartridges.

One might be tempted to loop the pen’s early success into the excitement over 3-D printing and at-home manufacturing and to think of it as a sort of handheld 3-D printer. But CreoPop marketing leader Andreas Birnik hesitated to make that comparison himself. 3-D printers, he noted, rely on some sort of model or blueprint. This pen is more like an art brush.

“With CreoPop, you can create anything, but there is no model,” he said. “You need to create it, slowly, step by step and assemble it bit by bit.”

It differs, too, from other versions of sculpting pens that use super-heated plastic to create the mini-sculptures. Think of something more along the lines of a hot glue gun: 3Doodler, a similar pen that raised over $2 million on Kickstarter last year, uses that model. Because CreoPop ink is cool, Birnik said, doodlers are able to pick up their creations as they build on them without the risk of burning themselves.

The novel ink, Birnik said, is really the main focus for the company, which has received funding and development grants from the Singaporean government to research other applications for the quick-curing, plastic-like ink. The company has developed inks that change color depending on their temperature, and it’s looking into edible ink, in response to customer requests.

It’s easy to imagine the pen being used by people who need to make very quick models or prototypes of small objects, such as artists or engineers. But the crowd-funding campaign, which has reached consumers in more than 50 countries, also shows that there’s a broad appeal to adults and kids who just want to goof around with the thing.

Birnik said that the fun aspect is certainly what makes the pen popular at his own home. “CreoPop is the only thing I’ve done that my daughter thinks is cool,” Birnik said.
HEALTH & SCIENCE

Fifth-grader tests 3-D-printed robotic arm to help other kids

BY MICHELE MUNZ

ST. LOUIS — The soon-to-be 11-year-old left the Washington University School of Medicine lab with an instruction manual for her new robotic arm: Don’t get it wet. Turn it off when not in use. Change the two nine-volt batteries.

But for a girl who has adapted to life with a left arm that ends just past her elbow, there’s no instruction manual for how to incorporate this new technology into her day. That will be up to her to figure out.

And researchers at the biomaterials laboratory will be trying to figure it out, too.

Delanie Gallagher of Spanish Lake, Mo., is the first of 10 children whom researchers plan to enroll in a study to determine how to develop a prosthetic that is useful for children born with all or part of a limb missing or whose limb is missing through trauma or surgery.

Most end up living without a prosthetic because it lacks function and only gets in the way. Of the more than 540,000 Americans living with upper-limb amputations, only about 20 percent use a prosthetic.

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Delanie’s new arm incorporates myoelectric technology — sensors that detect when muscles in the stump contract and signal parts in the prosthetic to move. Prosthetics with this technology typically cost from $25,000 to $50,000, too expensive for fast-growing children.

The Washington University lab created a hard plastic arm using a 3-D printer at a cost of just a few hundred dollars. The myoelectric technology was kept simple enough to keep the prosthetic low-cost and lightweight, with one sensor that signals the hand to either open or close, or the wrist to turn.

Nick Thompson, a scientist in the lab, hopes the simple route will make arm prostheses more accessible and useful to children.

“Tons of people are doing this now, but they are reaching for the fruit high in the tree, trying to develop something with the most functionality that is the closest you can get to your biological limb,” Thompson said. “We are going the opposite. We are looking for something quick that can be made and modified quickly. That is our goal.”

But the big question is how useful it will be. Delanie is proof of how children overcome. She had
difficulty thinking of something that she can’t already do.
What does she hope her new prosthetic will help her do?
“I don’t know,” Delanie said. “I don’t know what I can do.”

**Rosy Pink Petunia**

Delanie’s mother, Janet Gallagher, remembered when Delanie was a baby and got her first prosthetic to help her crawl. “She just dragged it along,” Gallagher said. It was quickly tossed aside.

Delanie has had two other prostheses, used only to help her steady and steer her bike, hold up a fishing pole or brace her bow and arrow.

“It didn’t help her,” Gallagher said. “She could do better without it.”

Using her stump, Delanie figured out how to color, use scissors, tie her shoes, braid her hair, make a ponytail and play the piano.

On a recent day at school at the Gateway Science Academy, she needed no help. She carried her books in a shoulder bag rather than a backpack. She held a pencil sharpener in the crook of her elbow as she turned her pencil.

She played with a piece of clay, molding it into a flower between her stump and hand. She twirled her hair with her stump and raised it high when the teacher sought answers from the class.

At lunch, Delanie ripped open bags with her teeth and braced her Capri Sun against her body so she could stab it with a straw.

When the English teacher read a book aloud, no one batted an eye at a quote by a character who lost part of her leg from a land mine: “Every day, I wished I had it back.”

Delanie’s fifth-grade classmates say they are excited about her new robotic arm, but they are used to how she is. “It’s going to be cool, but she does so much without it,” her best friend, Georgia Collier, said. “It’s going to be different.”

Gallagher said Delanie sometimes worries about her future. She wonders how she will drive a car, whether she will be able to take care of children.

As she enters her preteen years, she’s figuring out new things, such as how to hold a blow dryer, put on makeup and curl her hair.

Delanie definitely likes how the new arm looks. She asked that it be pink, engraved with her initials. She named it Rosy Pink Petunia Gallagher.

Charles Goldfarb, an orthopedic surgeon at St. Louis Children’s Hospital who cares for children with amputated limbs, said a prosthetic can have social benefits.

“Can we help her do more things a little similar to her peers?” Goldfarb said. That may become more important as she gets older. “A teenager wants to be like any other teenager,” he said.

**Sydney syndrome**

The Minimally Invasive Surgery Biomaterials Lab opened on the university’s medical campus just over three years ago. Its focus was using a 3-D printer to create and test bioabsorbable surgical mesh.

In 2014, the lab learned of three engineering students whose senior project involved using a 3-D printer to create a prosthetic for 13-year-old Sydney Kendall, who had lost her arm six years earlier in a boating accident.

That sparked the start of the lab’s work with prosthetic arms. “We asked, ‘Can we take this up and improve what the students have worked on?’” Thompson said.

A wire in the arm the students created for Sydney was connected to a sensor in her shoulder. Shrugging her shoulder caused the hand to open or close. The wire was cumbersome, she told the scientists, and difficult to use.

So the lab made Sydney a prosthetic whose socket contained a myoelectric sensor that could move the hand and wrist. She found that it needed a stronger grip and was heavy. They refined it again, printing her another last spring. The process offered promise.

“It justified to do this type of study on pediatric patients,” Thompson said. “That’s where we are now.”

Scientists hope a study of more children will give them feedback on how to overcome what they refer to as “Sydney syndrome” — the prosthetic sitting in a drawer collecting dust.

Participants will complete questionnaires three months, six months and a year after getting their prostheses.

“We now feel we have a design that is of high enough utility to try on multiple patients to see if there’s any benefit from using them,” Thompson said. “The patients will tell us what directions we need to go in to make it better.”

*Blythe Bernhard contributed to this report.*
Leaving Indelible Marks

BY SARAH KAUFMAN
Dance Critic

Originally Published November 23, 2016

When San Francisco Ballet principal Taras Domitro was sidelined with an injury, he decided to cheer himself up by getting another tattoo.

After coming up with the perfect statement, he used an app to translate it into Elvish, the Tolkien language.

The tattoo, which coils around his forearm, reads: “Everything is beautiful, and nothing hurts.”

In a field populated by young, exquisitely fit artists — in which pain is just part of the job, and one’s body is always on display — tattoos have become a fashionable form of self-expression and affirmation. Under his velvet doublet, the tenderhearted prince in “Swan Lake” might be inked with howling wolves and the Great Wall of China. The trembling swan queen herself could be tatted up beneath her tutu like a heavy-metal rocker.

One of the best-known tattooed dancers is Sergei Polunin, the former Royal Ballet principal who became a YouTube star with a yearning dance to Hozier’s “Take Me to Church” that put his lavish ink on view. (He was once part-owner of a London tattoo parlor.) New York City Ballet principal Joaquin De Luz bears intricate artwork on his shoulders, arms and ribs.

“It’s just one more way to give ourselves reminders and inspiration,” says Washington Ballet member Corey Landolt. His inked designs include the White Tree of Gondor, a symbol of hope, rebirth and resolve from “The Lord of the Rings,” and a pair of doves, commemorating a Christmas ornament his mother gave him. Like much of the body art that dancers exposed for this article, they hint at a longing for stability and uplift, desires that reflect the realities of an unpredictable, competitive profession shaped by subjective standards.

“You want to remind yourself of what your truth is,” says Julie Kent, artistic director of the Washington Ballet. When she was a member of the American Ballet Theatre, she watched her friends get one tattoo after another. Now, as a boss, she has to decide when her dancers should cover them up, and when it’s okay to flaunt them.

Tattooed dancers confront unique challenges. Their body ink’s ability to inspire also carries a burden. What if a performer in a shirtless contemporary work uses makeup to camouflage his half-sleeve of ink, but it turns his partner’s costume brown when he lifts her?

Placement is key. The Washington Ballet’s Sona Kharatian has a palm-size butterfly in honor of her late mother on her haunch, where it’s not likely to be seen. She has the word “harmony” inked on her ankle,
where her toeshoe ribbons conceal it. Covering tattoos in more exposed areas isn’t easy. Dancers not only sweat, but they have to lift, catch and clutch one another, which means damp body parts and makeup rubbing against expensive, difficult-to-clean costumes.

“Tattoo cover is a huge portion of what I do,” says Sarah Coy, who works in the makeup department at the San Francisco Ballet, as well as for film and television. Dancers are her most challenging clients. Coy and her colleagues use special-effects makeup mixed with alcohol, so it’s resistant to oil or water (which makes taking it off a separate challenge for tired dancers after a show). They apply it in thin layers so it doesn’t flake off. Thick bands of tattoos that encircle an arm require even more makeup layers and tricky color matching, because the skin inside the arm is lighter than on the outside.

It can take 20 to 40 minutes to cover a dancer, Coy says. The heavily inked might require a team of makeup artists for certain skintcentric roles, such as when Domitro starred in a work titled “Swimmer” wearing only a bathing suit. For the upcoming spring season, Coy plans to experiment with an airbrush gun to save time.

Some dancers can get by with a flesh-toned fabric sleeve. Elisa Clark, who performed with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company and the Mark Morris Dance Group before joining the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, has used that kind of sleeve to cover an inked-up arm. Many contemporary choreographers don’t mind visible tattoos, which is a good thing, because about half the Ailey company is tattooed, she says. But for works created by Ailey himself, tattoo coverage is mandatory, and the fabric sleeve is not foolproof.

“I was onstage in ‘Revelations,’ and I could feel it slide down to my wrist, during the opening section,” Clark says. To avoid overstretching, she now has three different sleeves hanging on the rack with her costumes.

“Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror, and I say, ‘Man, I wish I didn’t have any,’ ” says Sascha Radetsky, a former ABT soloist. His arms are a gallery of Native American images and tributes to Georgia O’Keeffe, Gustav Klimt and “Moby Dick.”

Having tattoos “makes things harder,” Radetsky says. “Preparing for a role is tough enough as it is — you have a lot of things to think about.” Covering lots of ink “adds one more element into the mix. And there’s some old-fashioned views about tattoos. Maybe on some tiny, subconscious level, that influences people’s decisions on casting.”