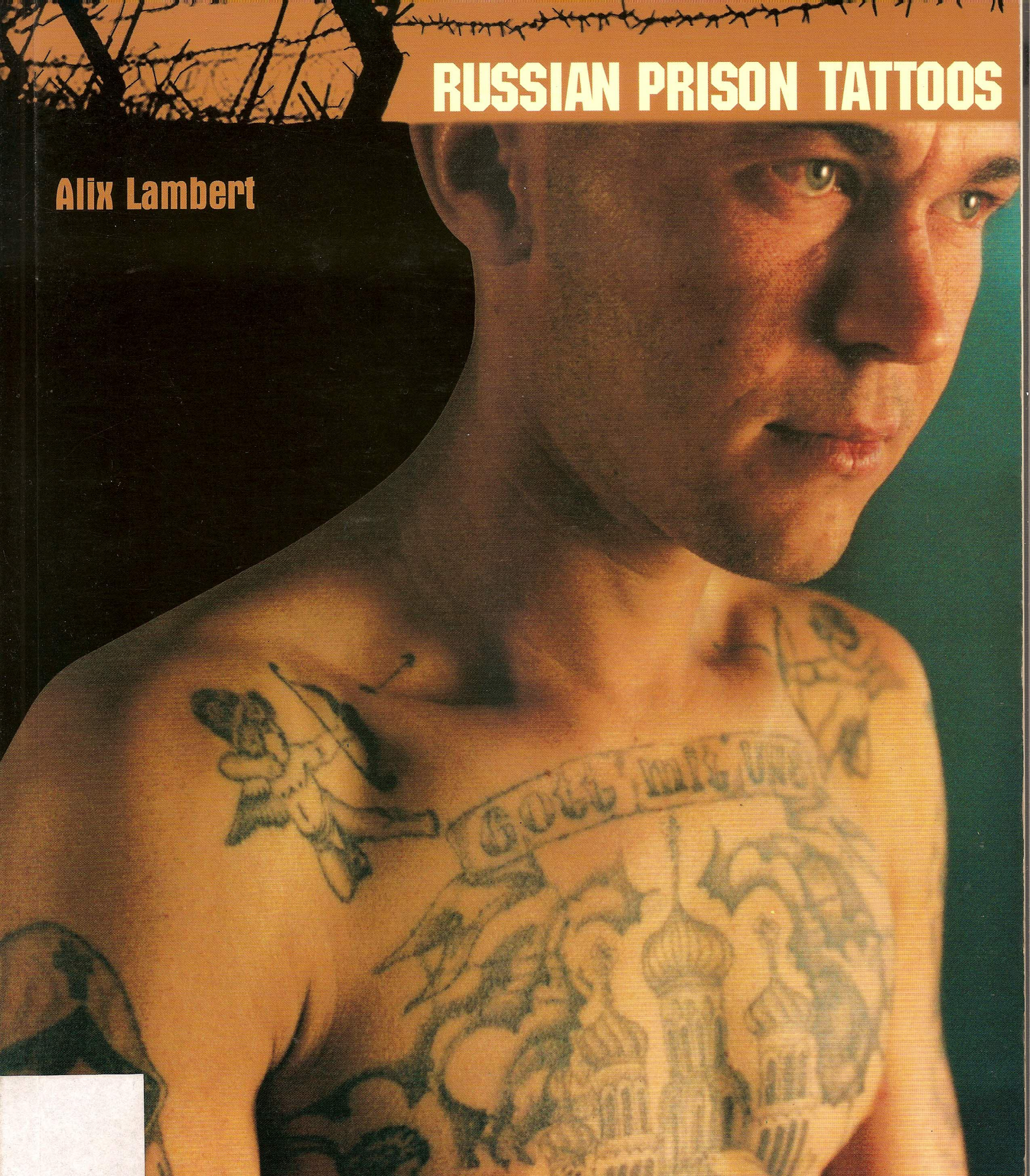


# RUSSIAN PRISON TATTOOS

Alix Lambert



**Codes of Authority, Domination, and Struggle**

A Schiffer Book







*Alix Lambert*

*Photo by: Anne Fishbein*

Enter into any cell of the teeming Russian prison system and the story of its inmates will be visible on the flesh. Prisoners tattoo the marks of their crimes – killers wear daggers, drug hustlers wear spiders – and of their captivity. This startling work gives unprecedented access behind the bars of some of the most notorious prison facilities in the former Soviet Union, and decodes the secret language of the tattoos therein. More than 190 powerful black and white and color photographs expose the veiled messages within the tattoo iconography, where crucifixions, Madonnas, executioners, animals, and insects are not what they seem. This book chronicles a day in the life of the modern-day Ivan Denisovich, capturing the dying art of tattooing in Russian prisons and the broken lives of the inmates who still observe the “Thieves’ Code.” This mesmerizing book presents tattoos as symbols of rank, survival, and human expression in a menacing world where even ink is contraband.



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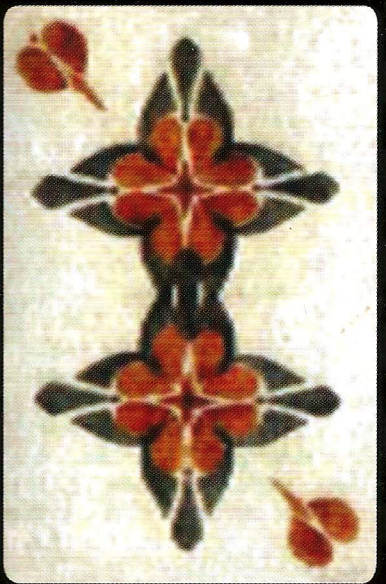
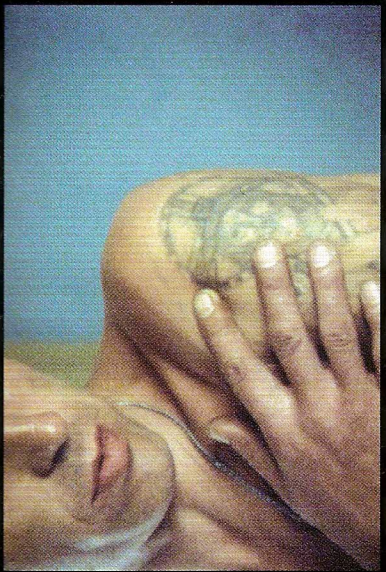
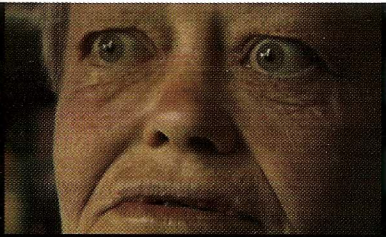
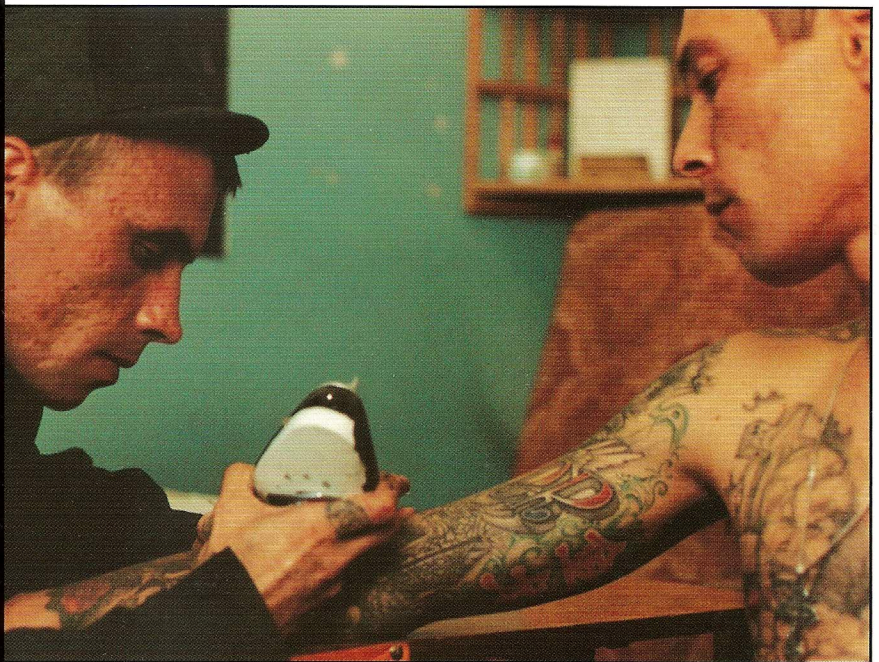
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# Russian Prison Tattoos

*Codes of Authority,  
Domination, and Struggle*

Alix Lambert  
*Text with Mary Christ*



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## About the Author

Alix Lambert is an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Her film, *The Mark of Cain*, was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, and aired on ABC's *Nightline*. Once named by the *New York Times* as one of "thirty people under thirty who will change the culture in the next thirty years," Lambert has created film, video, photography, performance art, and mixed media installations that have drawn international critical acclaim. Her artwork has been displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the Kwang Ju Biennale in Korea, the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris, and the Venice Biennale in Italy.

If you would like to purchase a copy of the documentary *The Mark of Cain* please email your request to: [pinkghetto@earthlink.net](mailto:pinkghetto@earthlink.net).

Mary Christ is a magazine journalist living in New York City. She is at work on her first novel.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for helping make the documentary *The Mark of Cain* – and this book – a reality. My co-producers Lalou Dammond and Gregor Clark. My line producer Tony Pemberton, film editor David Ritsher, and cinematographer Anastasi Mikhailov. My associate producer Althea Wasow and fearless production coordinator Lena Cherkasova. Recording artists Damon Locks and Wayne Montana for providing original music for the film and designer Laris Kreslins for providing early creative input to these pages. Matty Jankowski for his fiscal sponsorship and the New York State Council on the Arts for providing additional funding. Go East Productions for providing film support and Films Transit for handling the foreign distribution. I am indebted to Roberto Edwards and Robert Bingham for backing and believing in this important project. Finally, my family and close circle of friends for their constant support.

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