

Exhibition gallery text.

PROTECTIVE ORNAMENT  
Contemporary Amulets to Armor

From the beginning of time, humankind has sought reliable forms of physical protection and security. Accordingly, armor and amulets have existed since prehistory and are found in cultures across the globe. The contemporary works presented here demonstrate the crucial role that such bodily adornment still performs, and the rich and complex traditions of metalsmithing and jewelry that continue to inspire today's artists. This exhibition showcases some of the finest contemporary metalsmiths and artists and testifies to the continued relevance of such creative production, especially in our current "Age of Terror." The objects you'll see here address our ongoing need for protection and underscore the important safeguarding function of jewelry and other wearable ornament.

*Protective Ornament: Contemporary Amulets to Armor* was organized by the Metal Museum, Memphis, TN. The exhibition was curated by Suzanne Ramljak, Editor of *Metalsmith* magazine.

Generous support provided by ArtsFund and the Guendolen Carkeek Plestcheeff Fund for the Decorative and Design Arts. This exhibition is supported in part by a grant from the Washington State Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support provided by Seattle Metals Guild.

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### **Keeping Faith**

The root of the word “amulet” has been traced to both the Arabic *hamulate* (to hang or carry) and to the Latin *amuletum* (to remove or drive away). Indeed, amulets are typically hung on the body to divert or repel unwanted forces. Belief in amulets and talismans can afford peace of mind, if not full-fledged exemption from danger. They have been worn in good faith from prehistory up until this day. The full gamut of safeguarding measures is represented within these contemporary works, including the enlistment of animal parts, written text, sacred symbols, and cunning snares for the evil eye.

### **On Guard**

Lacking anatomical features such as pincers or quills, a human’s best defense can be his or her skill at devising physical enhancements and extensions. Defensive strategies commonly involve a guarded position, where one is harbored behind a forbidding barrier. Several artists in this section have created works in this vein, adorning the human form with harsh ruffs or unfriendly protrusions that prevent contact or approach. Such ornaments function like a barbed wire fence staked around the wearer. Borrowing from nature’s vast storehouse of tactics, other artists bedeck the body with thorns or horns that promise painful consequences if one dares to get too close.

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## **Second Skin**

Human skin is a soft and porous organ that offers little protection from the harsh outer world. Born without a natural exoskeleton, we seek fortification through artificial means, and armoring has been essential to humankind from the beginning of recorded time. An ingenious array of materials and forms has been devised to foster our invincibility, covering the anatomy from head to toe. With such encasement we aspire to the relative safety of insect or crustacean, both finely shielded creatures by design. The contemporary armor featured here offers a range of creative strategies for adaptation through reinforcement and artifice.

## **Attack Mode**

A good offense requires tactical planning, precision, and a degree of stealth. Within this category of offensive adornment we find a host of hidden or disguised forms ready to attack on a moment's notice, like the ornamental equivalent of a switchblade. Hatpins, hairpins, knuckledusters, and spiky jewelry all decorate and defend at the same time. An offensively adorned wearer can also flaunt their fortitude by donning miniature armaments or war-like imagery. Whether concealed or displayed, the aggressive wearables presented here can make would-be assailants think twice, or help ambush an attacker in the midst of an assault.

***Protective Ornament: Contemporary Amulets to Armor* includes 15 Northwest artists:**

Lori Talcot  
Nancy Worden  
Deborah Baxter  
Andy Cooperman  
Amy Johnston  
Jan Smith  
Maurie O'Dea  
Catherine Chandler  
Flora Book  
Karen Gilbert  
Opulent Project (Meg Drinkwater & Erin Gardner)  
Micki Lippe  
Ugo Serrano  
Keith Lewis  
Alexandra Chaney