



TOKENS & AMULETS

WORKSHOP NOTES

Project 2

a shared vision 2025



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From textile tokens to lucky charms, this project takes a look at our response to objects which are believed to have special powers to protect the wearer or to bring good fortune.



WORKSHOP VIDEO

You can find the video which accompanies this project on www.untangledthreads.co.uk The password to this section of the website is **thecollective** (in lowercase).



WORKSHOP KITS

For the GROUP PROJECT

Felt heart
Kilt pin with anchor loops
Cowrie shell



For your own PROJECT

Kilt pins
Blank wooden shapes
Threads & cords
Necklace ribbon
Beads
Embossing metal
Leather
Thick felt
Calico
Shrink plastic
Tyvek



the
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UNTANGLED THREADS

INTRODUCTION

Science and technology may constantly be moving forwards, but some primitive superstitions continue to have a firm hold on parts of our psyche.

On the face of it, the topic of Tokens & Amulets may feel like a fairly odd topic for us to look at, but bear with me ... even if you say that you can't take the idea of the protective power of amulets seriously, maybe you still have some little object that you keep about you 'just for luck'. You may laugh and say you know that it's power is not real, but I bet you'd think twice about throwing it away, and would feel anxious if you lost it?

Technology may have brought us lots of benefits which make us feel more secure, but until it can remove the fear of fundamental threats like disease, injury, ageing and death, many of us probably feel the need for a little 'supernatural' something to protect us?.

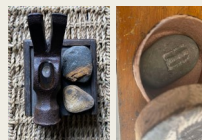
I've deliberately called this project '**Tokens and Amulets**' ... if you can't get behind the idea of the magically protective nature of objects, you may find it more comfortable to focus on the idea of 'gifts or tokens': objects which represent a feeling, an emotion, a memory, a message or a thought.

I'd like to take a quick look at the definitions of some of the different words that people have used over the years for various 'significant objects', and I hope that you might find something which resonates with you.



*Body Guards by Desmond Morris
ISBN: 1-86204-572-0*


In his book 'Body Guards' the world famous ethologist, Desmond Morris talks about 'The Armadillo Factor' .. the fact that human beings, unlike armadillos, do not have a hard protective shell which they can curl up in until the danger passes. So instead, for thousands of years, we have trusted in small, selected objects, which somehow make us feel a little safer when facing the hazards of daily life.



Whilst researching for this project and looking at my own 'treasures' I recognise that I do have a strong tendency to group together objects which hold emotional significance, and that a huge part of my 'gift giving' and 'image making' is based on symbolic gestures, emotional connections and psychological beliefs.

If anyone asked, I would say that my general outlook on life is influenced by the spiritual.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Amulet	Something specifically carried or worn about the person as a charm or preventative against evil, mischief, disease or witchcraft.
Mascot	Originally the mask worn by a sorcerer, but generally this means a person or thing which brings good luck.
Charm	This comes from the word for 'song' and relates back to the uttering of magical chants which would render someone or something 'enchanted'.
Talisman	An object consecrated by ritual which carries a magical or sacred inscription. Usually worn as an amulet but the essential difference is that a talisman always displays letters, numbers, text or abstract symbols.
Evil Eye 	<p>This is 'the hostile force that the misfortunes come from'. The evil eye transmits harm simply by staring at its victim. To survive you must avoid eye to eye contact.</p> <p>Amulets, charms, mascots etc are traditionally ways of dealing with perceived 'evil'. The following 'solutions' may act as inspiration when making your own amulet or token: You can ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • call on religious/spiritual beliefs • stand up to the evil and threaten it back • divert attention (often with lascivious sexual imagery) • outstare them (with symbol of eye) • bombard their senses (with lights, noises and smells) • Summon up the forces of nature (animal, vegetable or mineral)
Token	A thing serving as a tangible representation of a thought, quality, feeling or emotion.

A MODERN INTERPRETATION

Although it is easy for some to mock a belief in amuletic protection, the key point is that if you DO BELIEVE or TRUST in it, it might give you some comfort and a small peace of mind in certain difficult circumstances. This in turn lowers your stress levels and boosts your immune system. It might be worth considering that modern methods of 'keeping healthy' often do just the opposite ... they obsess us with stresses and anxiety which are actually our greatest enemies.

So, if we do believe that tokens, amulets, talismans and charms have the power to keep misfortune at bay, and that belief gets us through another day of fears and threats (some real, some imagined) ... well ... scientists might call it a 'placebo effect', but if it works for you ... why not ?

And at the very least, just being creative will stimulate a calming response through mindfulness and slow stitching! For clarity, I feel the need to say that the objects we are looking at in this project tend to fall in 3 distinct categories:

Personal & Particular
Ancient & Historical
Modern & Active

If we create our own tokens or amulets, it feels important to state that any 'power' we feel they have can really only ever be described as a personal belief. We can study ancient examples and historical beliefs, but we should also be mindful not to offend or trivialise anyone's modern spiritual or religious belief.

ANIMAL: Images of animals are very common in protective amulets and a particular characteristic of that animal is being harnessed. Sometimes the whole animal is used, but often just one part of it, such as tooth, claw, shell or horn.

HUMAN ANATOMY: Images of parts of the human body are very commonly used in amulets, most particularly the heart, the eye, the hand, the leg and the genitals.

ROCKS: Interest in minerals as amulets is very common. Each type of rock or metallic element is said to possess specific healing or protective properties and they are often associated with birth signs.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS: Most religions have some recognisable form of amulet (although the name used may be different). For example, the crucifix, the crescent, the star, the kara, the pi disc or the rosary.

PLANTS: The potential healing power of many kinds of flowers, fruits and plants is well established. In amulets you often find actual plant specimens as well as images being used.

WORDS: inscriptions on amulets are very common and although the words are sometimes clearly displayed, very often they are hidden away from immediate view in boxes or locket.



GROUP PROJECT

You will see as we go on with this series of group projects, that the 'instructions' you will be given will become less and less prescriptive, and more emphasis will be put on YOUR OWN INTERPRETATION of the materials and theme provided. In the first project (the wool pennies) we stuck to a united colour theme and just one basic technique.

For this project, we all have the same basic elements. It is up to you to combine them in some way as to create a 'token' which will represent YOU as part of our group... I suppose that I am hoping that the visual outcome will be quite like one board of the original 1,568 sawdust hearts project, but this time in miniature, and the heart motif will become an element of your design rather than the background to work on.



In previous group pieces the intention has been that your work loses its individual identity and becomes an integrated part of the whole. This time, your work should remain clearly identifiable and unique, but still be able to take its place within the uniformity of the whole piece.

In your pack you have 3 elements: a felt heart, a kilt pin with loops and a cowrie shell. You must use all three in your finished token. How you decide to combine these is up to you. You can use any techniques, add any fabric, embellishments, yarn, trinkets or stitching you like. I have made 3 'examples' to show you how you might use the kilt pin 'loops'.



Exposed



Concealed



Used to attach different elements



Why the Cowrie shell?

Cowrie shells, originating usually from the Red Sea, were widely valued as amulets in the ancient world.

Their resemblance to the female vulva and alternatively to a squinting eye is thought to underlie a magical association with fertility and with protection from the evil eye, respectively.



See the video for suggestions of ways in which you can attach the cowrie shell, pebbles and other irregular shaped natural finds to your work using threads and beads, without having to resort to using a glue gun!

The colour of the heart in your kit can easily be changed if you don't feel that it represents you, or suits the work you'd like to make: you could stain it or paint it, needle-felt a different colour over the top, or cover the surface with stitching like French knots or beading.



This example started with a cream coloured felt heart, which in itself made me think floral/purity/wedding etc. Previously, in a little trinket box which had belonged to my father, I had found a collection of tiny flowers, (a variety of paper, fabric, metal, ceramic and carved) and I wanted to celebrate my delight in this 'find' in some way. This project seemed like the perfect opportunity.



I attached the heart to a felt background, embellished with French knots and added some delicate beads. I chose a carved ivory piece and a fabric daisy together with the cowrie to attach to the finished token.



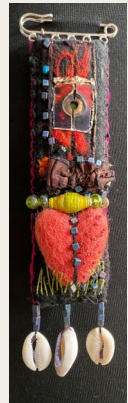
When I held a red felt heart in my hand, out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a sample I had made while working on my Darwin exhibition. The two pieces felt destined to be together, so I designed this token around the colour and my note from the original piece of work:

*'Over and over and over.
Deeper and deeper and deeper.
Darker and darker and darker, until
the only light shining
is at the end of a microscopic tunnel.'*

*There must have been times when
Darwin's compulsion for research had
an effect on his health and private
concerns.'*



No 27: Voyage of Discovery 2009



In this example the colour of the heart was simply the starting point for a collection of small pieces, including some beach finds, which I stitched and hung from the loops on the kilt pin. I ended up with something rather like a handbag charm.



SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR OWN PROJECT

TOKENS & AMULETS

Kilt pins
Blank wooden shapes
Threads & cords
Necklace ribbon
Beads
Embossing metal
Leather
Thick felt
Calico
Shrink plastic

The quarterly topics are intended to inspire your creativity. As with the Group projects, I am hoping to become less and less prescriptive when it comes to your Individual work. The word 'inspiration' has two meanings: to stimulate creativity and also to breathe in.

Before you can breathe in, you must first breathe out. So, make space for this new project by relaxing. Trust the process.

Read, make notes, think, research, investigate. You shouldn't be afraid to change direction either. Your first idea may not be the best one .. you may have several ideas, and it is up to you to investigate each one and find out which one gives you a genuine and continuing feeling of enthusiasm. If you don't find it, or if you begin to lose it, remember that it isn't always necessary to continue with something simply because you feel you have invested time in it.

Begin with a question and use that to guide you on a voyage of discovery. You may not know where you will end up, but you may find that it is just the place you wanted to be!



For me personally, the excitement of this topic is the fact that amulets are intended to be worn. That means that my question might be about finding ways of attaching something to your body or to your clothing: a piercing, a tattoo, a necklace or bracelet, a brooch or pin, something to go into your pocket, something which forms its own pocket etc etc.

Since childhood I have had a fascination for tiny vessels, hidden treasures, words and poetry - what better for me than a set of miniature decorated 'Russian doll' bags, made as a necklace, with hidden words contained in a tiny book?

Some amulets are specifically designed to be returned to nature .. to be destroyed, ritually buried or burnt. The question could be how to record an action. It doesn't have to follow any particular format .. it could be a series of images which record the creation and subsequent destruction of an object, or the remains of the object itself.

Your question could be 'how do I show someone that I love them?' or 'how can I keep the memory of something alive?'

Once you have worked out what your question is you can then investigate the best way of answering it ... look at different techniques, different materials, different scales ...

It's over to you ...

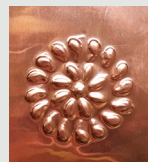
In your workshop kit there are lots of different bits and pieces which may or may not spark your interest. You certainly don't have to investigate all of them, but here are a few suggestions which you could think about, and a few techniques which might be new to you.

See the video for full details.



Embossing Metal

You can trace a design onto a thin sheet of metal which can then be worked with an embossing tool to produce raised or sunken designs. This is a relatively inexpensive way of making metallic embellishments. The metal is easy to fold too, so it can be used to create covers for little booklets, or to form around 3d blocks.



Leather

Although the use of leather might be slightly controversial, I've added some small scraps to your workshop kit because it has a very authentic look when making amulets or charms. You can punch holes in it to stitch, or emboss patterns and shapes. The contrast between the suede side and the leather surface is also interesting to work with.



Shrink Plastic

Shrink plastic is brilliant for making tiny embellishments. You can draw or print onto the plastic at full size and then heat shrink it to approximately 1/3 of its original size. One of the great things about it is that you can shape it with scissors and make holes in it at full size before shrinking. Any colour you put on the surface will intensify when shrunk.



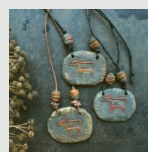
Tyvek and Polyester felt

Tyvek is wonderful for making rolled beads to decorate your amulet or token. The melted surface is great when used in conjunction with glass seed beads and wire, and it is so simple to colour before or after heating.



Air Hardening Clay

This is amazing for making small 'ceramic' charms. You can easily emboss, then paint or stain the surface.





Shisha Mirrors

You can attach flat mirrors (or other 3D found objects like washers, coins, pebbles and sea-washed glass or ceramic) using several different designs of stitching.

Broderie Anglaise or Eyelet Stitch

You can adapt this traditional stitch to create some interesting decorative effects with contrasting backing fabrics.

You can find examples of these and other decorative stitches examples on The RSN stitch bank.



www.rsnstitchbank.org



Peyote Stitch Bezel

You can use a simple beading stitch called 'peyote stitch' to form a decorative edge around a flat-backed object such as a cabochon or even around irregular pebbles. These can be attached to a larger piece of work, or they can be made on a piece of non-fray stabiliser as a free form pendant.



SHOW AND TELL

I know that this part of the project is a challenge for some of us, but hopefully it will get easier as we go along. You will be able to refer to the exhibition catalogue for the first project on wool pennies, and will have had a chance to see what other members of the group wrote.

You hope that you might eventually feel some agreement with the writer of this note which I received:

"I hate talking (even thinking) about any of the work I do. At least, that's what I thought. Forcing it out of myself has been a complete revelation. Can't thank you enough - so glad I did this year."

TOKENS & AMULETS TIMETABLE

7th April Receive your workshop kit

23rd June Deadline to send GROUP PROJECT work
Deadline to send work for SHOW & TELL

3rd August
10th August
17th August
24th August
31st August
7th September
14th September
21st September
28th September

OPEN HOUSE

for members & non-members
FREE ENTRY



The Exhibition is also available online from 4th May

Dates & Times of LIVE VIDEO LINKS

to be announced

6th October Tokens & Amulets work is returned to you

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