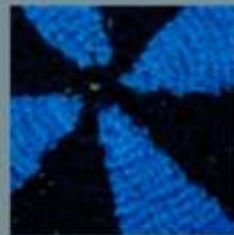


13 AMULETS

by Basketry Plus

Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology
1 to 31 May 2012



BASKETRY PLUS

Basketry Plus is a group of artists and makers who share a common interest in basketry. Our aim is to push the concept of basketmaking forward and to introduce the craft to a wider audience.

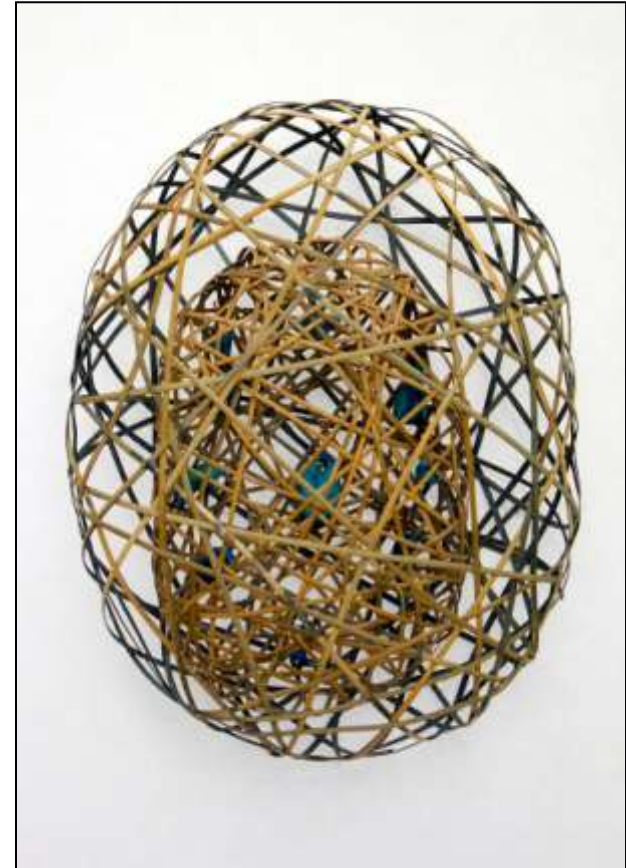
Work by each maker varies considerably, from functional and non-functional containers to sculptural wall hanging pieces and jewellery, each object is unique. What links its members together is a passion for experimenting with the rich and diverse range of basketry techniques and materials.

For more information about the group, please have a look at our website: www.basketryplus.org.

SEE THROUGH BLUE by Norma Adams

My primary inspiration from the Petrie collection was the luminous deep turquoise blue of the Egyptian faience used extensively for various artefacts including amulets. I knew I wanted to use this colour so I collected some personal objects - a blue glass fish bead from Egypt, a bead with a ' lucky eye' on it, and a star-shaped turquoise stone bead. The other six 'amulets' are natural forms I found, either in my garden or on the sea shore. Being naturally coloured, I dyed them in imitation of blue faience. This, I discovered, was extremely ancient in origin, being developed 5,000 years ago in Egypt. The colour is produced by sodium, a component of the paste, coming to the surface during firing and, as if by magic, developing a form of glaze.

As part of the embalming process Egyptian mummies were wrapped in linen for extra preservation. Significant amulets were carefully positioned between layers of cloth to protect the body from evil spirits on the journey to the afterlife and during it. I took this idea by using a group of amulets and positioning them in a contained context. The double layer of weaving around the charms is reminiscent of layers of linen. Once the mummy has been sealed inside it's sarcophagus, the contents, including its amulets are no longer seen. I have used this idea by hiding and protecting the objects inside two shells; the observer needs to look hard to see the barely visible contents.



Techniques: random weave

Materials: dyed chair cane, copper wire, glass beads, turquoise, tooth, chalk pebble, shell and plastic

BESOM by Sherry Doyal

Botanical specimens are often a starting point for my work as a basketry artist. The Petrie collections include preserved botanic funerary garlands and materials. Amulets are charms against evil and the materials used in construction have associated sympathetic magic. Wands were used in Egyptian funerary practice, a focus of fertile power over death. A wand might be a besom or bundle of twigs of a wood with magic properties. I also like the use of the word besom to denote a female upstart.



Techniques: plaiting and assembly

*Materials: white willow, turquoise in bees wax, mulberry paper and dried *Narcissus papyraceus**

REBIRTH by Lorraine Gilmore

My amulet is inspired by the many spirals which can be found in the Petrie Museum including on vessels, seals, scarabs and amulets. The collection also contains many shells which in themselves are spiral forms.

The weave emulates the internal structure of the nummulite shell found in a decorative piece in the collection. When bisected horizontally, the nummulite is a continuous spiral, divided into small compartments. The shell was found in limestone used to build the Great Pyramids. Shells were often seen as amulets of protection.

In *Egyptian Decorative Art* (1999), Petrie said that the spiral was “...one of the greatest elements of Egyptian decoration”, yet my research suggests that no particular amuletic or religious significance was associated with the symbol which is interesting when one considers the proliferation of symbols in ancient Egypt. More recently, the spiral has become a powerful symbol in many cultures and is often associated with eternal life which seems like a fitting attribute to bestow on a contemporary amulet.

The deep blue colour alludes to the gemstone lapis lazuli which was highly prized in ancient Egypt and is found in various items within the collection. Lapis lazuli was used to represent heaven or the universe. It was also associated with fertility and rebirth.



Technique: Perigordin weave

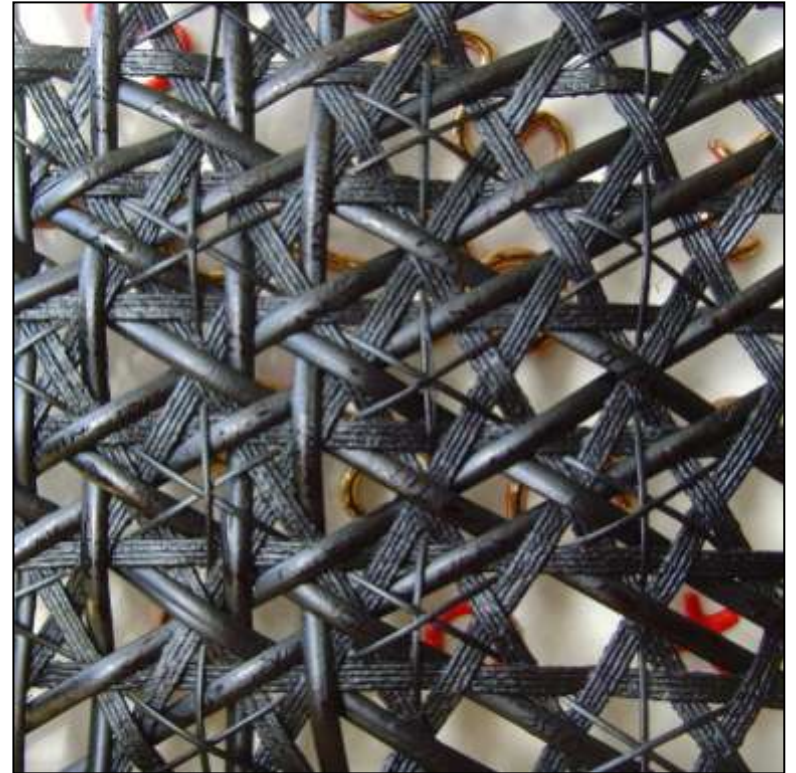
Materials: center cane

ONE FOR SORROW by Stella Harding

My modern day amulet is a charm against magpies – the bird people love to hate. In European folklore magpies (*Pica Pica*) have long been regarded as totem animals – associated with divination and the gift of prophesy: hence the old rhyme ‘one for sorrow, two for joy’, etc. A single magpie was seen as an omen of ill fortune and people would invoke spells of protection. A common one was to give salutation and to repeat three times ‘devil, devil, I defy thee’ or to utter the words ‘good morning Mr Judge and how’s your wife?’ In Somerset people carried an onion as protection against magpies.

My amulet references some of the attributes of magpies such as their tendency to ‘steal’ shiny objects to feather their nests. They are also regularly trapped and killed for their aggressive, predatory behaviour such as eating the eggs and young of other birds. They have even been observed taking small songbirds in flight.

As a power object my amulet also draws on the darker side of basketry – to trap and cage, constrain and kill. The red and gold porcelain letters trapped within - inspired by gold, coral, carnelian and faience bead amulets in the Petrie collection - spell out indecipherable words, a talisman (written charm) against human magpies who would steal our most precious jewels.



Techniques: plaiting

Materials: mixed media and porcelain

SAFE DELIVERY, AN AMULET FOR CHILDBIRTH by Joyce Hicks

Hippos lived in and around the Nile in Ancient Egypt and were revered by the Egyptians for the forceful protective behaviour they displayed towards their young. Taurt was a domestic goddess that had the body of a hippo, a long mane of hair ending in a crocodile tail and lion paws for feet. She also had a rounded pregnant belly. She was found in the home or worn as an amulet, protecting women in childbirth and their children.

In my amulet for childbirth a carved hippo is suspended in a randomly looped bag shaped like the hieroglyph for a basket. Protective knotted and looped fibres connect various plaited bark beads together, one of which has an Uzat Eye, the eye of Horus. Faience bark beads, one of which is protectively wrapped, link all these elements together to form a necklace.

Unfortunately, as in ancient Egypt, giving birth is still a risky business for women today. The World Health Organisation estimates that approximately 1000 women and girls die every day from easily preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth. One of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to reduce this death rate by three quarters by 2015. It is a target that is proving difficult to meet in many developing countries. Sadly, while you have been looking at Safe Delivery and reading this text a woman will have died from a complication of pregnancy or childbirth somewhere in the world.



Techniques: Plaiting, looping, cordage

Materials: Eucalyptus barks, ramie, giant nettle and raw silk fibres. Ancient iron beads and soapstone from Africa.

UNEARTHED by Elaine Kingsford

There are many fragments taken from the earth in the Petrie Museum and in a way they interest me more than completely intact objects. They have a mystery about them and I find them both intriguing and charming.

In 2009 we took over an allotment in Hertford. The fragments of clay pipes have been unearthed whilst digging the plot over the last 3 years and no matter how many times the soil is worked over, there are still more to find. I save them all, soaking, bleaching and cleaning them and like many collections of things, have often wondered what to do with them.

The allotments have been worked periodically since the 1800's and one can imagine men working and smoking all those years ago, snapping off a section of the stalk when it became blocked and discarding it onto the earth – a little like people throwing away cigarette butts today. I have never found a complete pipe bowl.

The allotment is a place of peace and quiet and working on it invariably induces feelings of calm and contentment. My collection of pipe fragments evokes the special nature of the land and this piece symbolises the healing powers of Plot 61b.



Technique: twining

Materials: clay pipe fragments and cabled cotton warping yarn

KEEP SAFE MY LOVE by Suni Lopez

As an artist I am interested in the discovery aspect of the work. I will always have an idea, a thought, and sketches that will serve to give shape to that idea. However I will enter into a kind of dialogue with the materials, like a dance where I will try to listen to the material's particular movement. It is this process of discovery that fascinates me as well as the use of found objects and materials.

In this exhibition, 13 Amulets the process is not so much of discovery as it is of remembrance, my mother's remembrance. She would, before each of us children was born, embroider a tiny amulet that she would place close to our skin under our garments. She would use silk and golden thread. Inside she would place pieces of paper where prayers had been written as well as herbs. This she did for safety and no doubt an expression of her love and great care she always put into her care for us. They were incredibly beautiful. For that beauty and care I feel very grateful.



Technique: twining

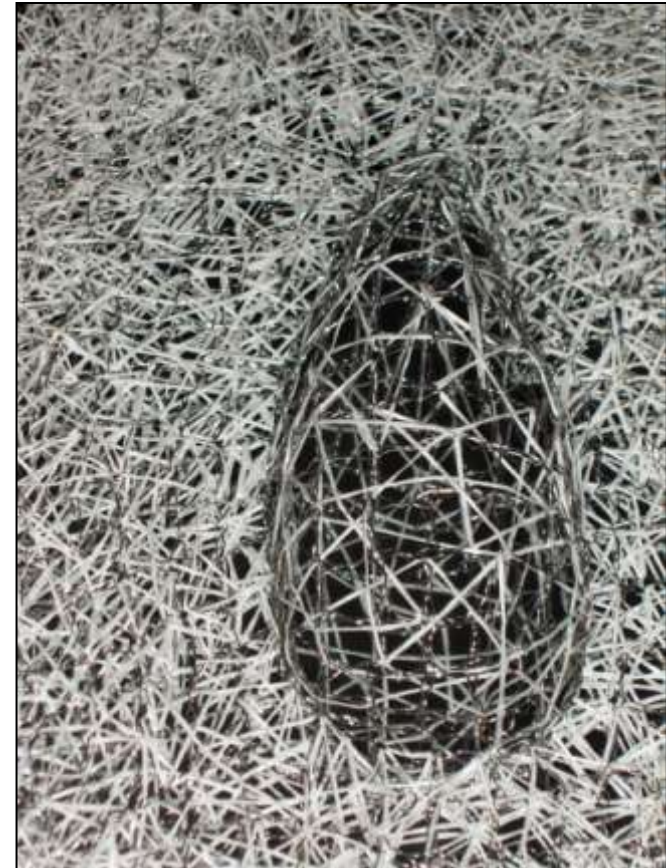
Materials: wire, plaster and somband

THIS OBJECT HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY REMOVED by Rachel Max

The most beautiful is the object
which does not exist
it does not serve to carry water
or to preserve the ashes of a hero
it was not cradled by Antigone
nor was a rat drowned in it
it has no hole
and is entirely open
seen
from every side
which means
hardly anticipated
the hairs
of all its lines
join
in one stream of light
neither
blindness
nor
death
can take away the object
which does not exist

(Zbigniew Herbert, *Study of an Object*)

Carried in order to give protection against evil and harm, an amulet, for me, is predominantly an object. What if there is no object, if the object doesn't exist, or it exists only as a number or a trace, an imprint, a record or simply a memory? These were just some of the thoughts that crossed my mind when I visited the Petrie Museum a few months ago. How fitting it seemed when I stumbled upon a label hiding in one of the crammed showcases, informing me that object UC4320 had been 'temporarily removed'. In spite of the fact that I did not see object 4320, it was, nevertheless, the inspiration for my work.



Techniques: plaited, twined and interlaced

Materials: stainless steel wire and paper string

LETTERS FROM MY FAMILY by Geraldine Poore

By an 'amulet' we usually mean a protective piece of jewellery. Amulets in this literal sense were worn by both living and dead Egyptians to protect them against misfortune such as disease, and to encourage good fortune, health and wealth.

The inspiration for my piece however comes from the affectionate, domestic, quality of many of the grave goods displayed here in the museum, which were sent by a deceased's family for him or her to use in the Afterworld. The miniature items representing such things as a leg of beef, or a bunch of vegetables suggest the idea of a family sending packages, of sustenance or possibly letters or photographs, with a relative who is making a journey in order to make that journey bearable and to protect them from the uncertainties ahead. So these packages are also amulets of a kind.'



Technique: plaiting

Materials: willow bark, waxed linen thread, hazel, paper and acrylic paint

SERENITY by Anne Ratnarajah

The inspiration for this piece comes from a variety of sources – I am particularly drawn to the beaded amulets of the Petrie Collection, which links to my fascination with beaded African work; but similarly I love the amulets that have found objects within them.

As part of my research for this exhibition I kept returning to beads and the value that was placed upon them as well as the messages they were used to convey. My formative years were spent in Africa, and my work is hugely influenced by my time there. Initially, I planned to work with beads for this exhibition, but the idea evolved into using copper wire, which was also used, particularly in traditional items of value.

This amulet is woven around a piece of milky quartz from South Africa. Milky quartz is associated with innocence and tranquility, and is also believed to allow us to view the world without prejudices. In addition, some believe it prevents us from being overwhelmed by strong, usually negative, emotions. Copper is said to energise, and combining quartz and copper is believed to balance the body's energetic field. The zig-zag pattern is a protective pattern (Spears of Shaka – Zulu); and in Zulu beadwork, green represents contentment, blue faithfulness.



Technique: Mbenge (South African telephone-wire baskets)

Materials: milky quartz and copper wire

STRANDLINE AMULET by Maggie Smith

Inspiration for this piece came from the Petrie's collection of amulets and in particular the linen amulet bag (to be worn round the neck). Further research led me to focus on creating a bespoke amulet that would protect the owner.

My work is often inspired by the materials around me, sometimes starting from a found object which I build a form around, using materials from the same location. On this occasion I realised some of the objects I had collected from the strandline were already recognised as having protective powers as amulets - the stone with a natural hole in it and the piece of burnt wood to protect against evil, the sharp fish bone that puts the evil eye to flight for fear of being pierced.



Taking these as my start I further enhanced their protective powers by:

- Adding the bag of sand (the witch must count the grains before she can enchant the wearer)
- Using red believed to resist the power of evil spirits
- The basketry techniques themselves

Twisting and knotting believed to trap evil spirits by perplexity, and to close cord into the purity of a protective circle and used in sequence, form a netted bag to further protect and carry the amulets.

SECRET CURRENT by Margaret Sparks

I like responding to museum collections and have done so in my drawing and printmaking, so I was glad of this chance to try it with basketry. I came to the Petrie Museum and drew without anything particular in mind, except that I wanted to make a protective amulet which I could imagine worn over the chest, or perhaps hanging in the house. Two objects emerged as my influences. The beads in the net dress reminded me of the clay pipe stems that I find on the Thames foreshore, where I work as an archaeological volunteer, so I used some of them to recreate a section of the beading. It seemed appropriate to have something from our great river and its history. The striking pattern and vibrant colours of a small faience ball provided the inspiration for the central roundel. The complete amulet is quite Egyptian in feeling but draws on much more recent archaeology, and should provide protection in the modern world.



Techniques: coiling and assembly

Materials: cotton and synthetic thread, string and clay pipe stems

DIVINITY by Joan West

In the past I have been fascinated by the amuletic gifts left at holy wells and trees in Ireland. These have taken the form of rags, coins, pebbles, shells, pins or flowers. In return for these gifts the petitioner would ask for good luck or healing from these sacred places. Throughout the world these transactions were commonplace in the past. In response I crafted a series of shrines suggesting the shape of a female made from papier mache and embroidery.

In ancient Egyptian society the Eye of Horus was a very powerful amulet, the eye protecting the wearer from evil. I was inspired by the small figurines in the Petrie Museum to make my own divine amulet in the form of a female figure and have adapted her shape from the Eye of Horus which has pleasing curves.

I made a former from papier mache and worked over it using random weave. It was woven in sections and, when removed, was sewn together. Abaca fibre, iris and day lily leaves were used and blue beads added which also are supposed to deflect evil.



Technique: random weave

Materials: iris, day lily leaves and abaca