Talismans, Charms, and Amulets

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Materials

- Fabrics such as cotton, linen, osnaburg, or silk scraps (You will need 2 pieces slightly larger than the intended finished size.)
- Stuffing such as wool roving, shredded wool batting, or polyester fiberfill
- Natural materials infused with scent (I used cedar, rosemary, and lavender.)
- 50wt cotton thread for construction
- Fibers for embellishment such as silk or cotton hand-dyed fibers and perle cotton
- Embellishments (collected over the years or gathered now)
- Leather cording, silk ribbon, or metal chain
- Metal findings to attach the cord to the amulet
- Chalk pencil
- Freezer paper
- Stiletto or chopstick

People of nearly every culture create talismans, charms, and amulets. They are small pieces worn to protect against evil or danger, to bring the wearer good luck, or to endow the owner with an ability or power (such as courage or speed).

Since my childhood, I have collected small objects, both natural and handmade, that I love; I have several large jars filled with special shells, stones, beads, metal charms, and bits of wood. These small objects bring back powerful memories and seem infused with meaning.

I recently realized that I could enjoy these items more if I used them in small pieces of art that I could wear as jewelry.

Note: For each piece, you will need 2 pieces of fabric that are slightly larger than the finished amulet size.

1. Make a pattern. Consider the size; you don’t want to wear something too big, or heavy, around your neck. Draw the pattern onto freezer paper and cut it out.

2. Iron the freezer paper pattern (waxy side down) onto the wrong side of 1 of the fabric pieces. (figure 1) Trace around it, using a chalk pencil or other marking device. (figure 2) Remove freezer paper. Cut 2.

3. Pin the front and back pieces, right sides together.

4. Stitch the 2 pieces together, leaving a small opening for turning right side out. Backstitch at the beginning and end.

5. Trim the seam allowances to a scant 1/4” and clip the corners to reduce bulk, making sure not to cut through the stitching. (figure 3)

6. Turn right side out, using a tool to push out the seams and corners.

7. Tuck the raw edges at the opening inside. Fill the amulet with your preferred stuffing. (figure 4) Hand
stitch the opening closed, using thread that matches the fabric.

8. Add hand stitching over the surface of the amulet, as desired. (figure 5) I love the way wool compresses when heavily hand stitched. It creates a nice, firm surface for embellishments. (figure 6) Embellish the amulet with meaningful objects, stitching them down with perle cotton or decorative thread.

9. Attach cording, ribbon, a chain, or other material so you can wear the amulet around your neck.

**Amulet Examples**

**“Matriarchy”**

The focus of this piece is two lingerie pins I inherited. They either belonged to a grandmother or great-grandmother. Lingerie pins were used during Victorian times, and slightly after, to hold the straps from bras and camisoles in place under dresses and blouses. This pair is quite elegant, made from engraved rose gold, with delicate clasps. Too small to wear as a brooch, they were languishing in my jewelry box, but here they take center stage and make for an interesting conversation starter. For the fabric base, I used some hand-dyed silk/cotton blend that reminded me of lingerie, added some glass beads, and used a piece of hand-dyed silk ribbon for the tie.

**“Aotearoa”**

Aotearoa means “land of the long white cloud,” or New Zealand, in Māori. I purchased the disk of pāua (Māori for what is called abalone in America) on a recent trip to New Zealand, and showcased it on a piece of hand-dyed linen in colors that remind me of the brilliant aqua and teal waters of that country. The shells are from an American beach, and are a reminder that all of the earth’s waters, and its people, are connected. The antique brass key is a symbol of doors opening through travel. The stuffing includes some sand. I attached metal findings to the top of the amulet, and strung the piece with leather cording.

**“Be Mine”**

This amulet features a silver and red crystal heart and lots of embroidered X kisses. (figure 7) I added an extra flap (created as a separate piece, then sewn on the back, turned to the front, and stitched down a few times) that gives the illusion that it is a little purse. The silver chain runs between the flap and the base.

**Suggested Embellishments**

Here are some ideas for embellishments that fit with several themes you might consider.

**Remembrance**

- Scrap of fabric from baby clothes, wedding gown, or work clothes
- Special bead
- Small brooch or earring
- Dog’s tag
- Military dog tag
- Military medal or patches
- House key
- Scents: lavender or rosemary

**Forest**

- Pebble
- Piece of wood
- Feather
- Scent: cedar
- Stitching: tree branches, leaf veins

**Seashore**

- Seashell
- Driftwood
- Sea glass
- Sand (include as a vial, or in a small plastic bag with the stuffing)

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