



Arms and Armor exhibition at the Bruce Museum



The Bruce Museum is creating a novel way of looking at arms and armor. Their upcoming exhibition pairs man-made items with those created in nature.

Located in Greenwich, Connecticut, the [Bruce Museum](#) often focuses on the multidisciplinary aspects of bringing together art and science. Starting on March 7th, they will be presenting "Arms and Armor: Evolution and Innovation."

"Arms and Armor" explores the parallel ways natural selection and human innovation influence the shape, composition and function of structures ranging from turtle shells to chain mail. Weapons and armor from around the world are displayed side-by-side with natural history specimens such as taxidermy, skeletons and fossils. Rather than being grouped culturally or taxonomically, objects are arranged by shared function.



Samurai Helmet – Edo Period, Japan – Bruce Museum Collection. Gift of Mrs. Matthew E. Hanna. Photo by Paul Mutino

Examples abound and include segmented armor that provides lightweight, flexible protection, and thus has arisen hundreds of times in the animal world in species ranging from centipedes to armadillos. Japanese samurai developed a similar style of armor, using overlapping bands of lacquer-plated metal. Heavier plate armor provides better protection but limits movement. In the exhibition, this paradigm is exemplified by juxtaposing the bony plate armor of the giant, extinct fish Dunkleosteus with the steel suits of armor worn by knights during the Middle Ages.



Kukri from Nepal – Bruce Museum Collection 08783. Gift of Heinrich Dueringer. Photo by Paul Mutino

An unexpected example on view compares the Aztec macuahuitl, a club lined with razor sharp obsidian, to the fangs of the vampire bat. These weapons each derive efficacy from razor-sharp edges that easily cut into their target. While the edges of the bat incisors are honed through intentionally grinding away the dentin layer of the teeth, the edges of the human weapon are created by carefully fracturing volcanic glass.

Beyond shared functions, the exhibition explores how intraspecies competition can lead to impressive and even bizarre weaponry. The sharp horns of the steenbok antelope and the prominent pincher-like cranial projections of the Hercules beetle provide striking examples of features that are used to battle rivals rather than ward off predators. The unwieldy horns of the Hercules beetle in many ways mirror the long wooden lances used by jousting knights. Neither structure is ideal for lethal combat, but both are perfect for ritualized competition.



Kulah Khud Helmet, 18th-19th century, Persia – Bruce Museum Collection 16831.03. Gift of Miss Amelia F. MacFarlane. Photo by Paul Mutino

"Many of the most remarkable natural weapons evolve not for hunting or defending against predators but for competing with members of one's own species," Ksepka said. "When competition for mates or resources is channeled into ritual aggression, it can lead to structures that are wildly impractical for normal activity, but which give an animal the upper hand in interspecies combat."

The exhibition runs from March 7th to August 11th and features objects from the Bruce Museum collection, as well as loans from the Worcester Art Museum, Stamford Museum & Nature Center, Yale Peabody Museum and private collectors. To learn more, please visit the [Bruce Museum website](#).



Suit of Armor – Photo and armor courtesy of Jeff Wasson

Related Posts

- [Medieval Armor in a Prayer Book](#)
- [Major exhibition on medieval armor set to begin at Toledo Museum of Art](#)
- [The Interrelationships of Costume and Armor](#)
- [Arms and Armor of the Medieval Knight](#)
- [St. Louis is the place to see medieval armor this spring](#)

Advertisement

REMOVE ADS

Subscribe to Medievalverse

Email address

First name

Last name

I consent to receiving your weekly newsletter via email.

Powered by [EmailOctopus](#)

TAGS • [MUSEUMS](#)

[PREVIOUS POST](#)

[NEXT POST](#)

Become a Patron

We've created a Patreon for Medievalists.net as we want to transition to a more community-funded model.

We aim to be the leading content provider about all things medieval. Our website, podcast and Youtube page offers news and resources about the Middle Ages. We hope that are our audience wants to support us so that we can further develop our podcast, hire more writers, build more content, and remove the advertising on our platforms. This will also allow our fans to get more involved in what content we do produce.

Medievalists Membership

Become a member to get [ad-free access](#) to our website and our articles. Thank you for supporting our website!

Advertisement

REMOVE ADS



Our Online Courses



Medievalists Maps

Advertisement

REMOVE ADS



Read Next

[Medieval Armor in a Prayer Book](#)

Advertisement

REMOVE ADS

