Arms and Armor exhibition at the Bruce Museum

Bruce Museum website

Museum collection, as well as loans from the Worcester Art Museum, Stamford Museum & Nature Center, and the University of Connecticut, are on display. In the exhibition, “Arms and Armor: Evolution and Innovation,” visitors can explore the parallel ways natural selection and human innovation have shaped the development of weapons and armor. Known for its excellent collection of natural history specimens such as taxidermy, skeletons and fossils, the museum will be presenting “Arms and Armor: Evolution and Innovation.” Located in Greenwich, Connecticut, the upcoming exhibition pairs man-made items with those created in nature.

The exhibtion runs from March 7th to August 11th and features objects from the Bruce Museum website.

In terms of protecting ourselves from threats, there are incredible connections between predator-prey interactions and the development of natural weapons. “Arms and Armor” explores the parallel ways natural selection and human innovation have shaped the development of weapons and armor. It will feature a variety of exhibits, including a display of suits of armor from the 17th-century dueling swords to the jaws of the giant, extinct fish Dunkleosteus.

Neither structure is ideal for lethal combat, but both are perfect for ritualized competition. Rather than ward off predators, the unwieldy horns of the Hercules beetle provide striking examples of impressive and even bizarre weaponry. The sharp horns of the steenbok antelope and the 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 modern human weapons are created by carefully fracturing volcanic glass.

An unexpected example on view compares the Aztec macuahuitl, a club lined with razor-sharp obsidian blades, to the fangs of the vampire bat. These weapons each derive efficacy from their distinctive means of origin. Objects like the Kulah Khud Helmet, a 18th-century Persian helmet with a large nasal guard, and the bony overlapping bands of lacquer-plated metal on the plate armor of the giant, extinct fish Dunkleosteus demonstrate the effective use of various materials for protection.

“The best example of the animal kingdom’s answer to the challenge of lethal combat is the koala bear,” according to the exhibition catalog. Due to its small size, the koala’s teeth are only about an inch long, but the koala’s teeth are uniquely suited for anchoring itself securely to the tree trunk. As a result, the koala is able to be a formidable fighter, with the teeth of a koala being harder than the steel of a sword. In the exhibition, this paradigm is exemplified by juxtaposing the bony overlapping bands of lacquer-plated metal on the plate armor of the giant, extinct fish Dunkleosteus but limits movement. In the exhibition, this paradigm is exemplified by juxtaposing the bony overlapping bands of lacquer-plated metal on the plate armor of the giant, extinct fish Dunkleosteus but limits movement.

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 turtle shells to the leathery wings of bats. This theme is further explored in the exhibition through a comparison of the steel suits of armor worn by medieval knights and the chain mail of the Roman soldier. While each is constructed of overlapping plates, the key difference between the two is that the overlapping plates of chain mail fit over the body like a flexible, protective suit of armor, while the overlapping plates of plate armor fit together like sections of armor and create a barrier that is sturdy enough to protect the wearer from a sword.

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