Honors 499 Project
Kristi Southwood
Advisor: Pat Nelson
Subject: Metals
Content Area: Chain Mail

My objective for my Honors 499 project was to create three pieces using chain mail for purposes other than the traditional use in armor. The three areas of use I explored are clothing, vessels, and jewelry. I created one finished product from each area, utilizing chain mail as the main techniques. The main materials are silver, copper, and brass for the chain mail, but sheet metal, cloth, stones, etc. were also incorporated into the projects.

In creating the chain mail, I explored the different patterns and designs of chain mail to manipulate its appearance in each project. I also saw how chain mail work in conjunction with other materials. My reason for exploring the uses of chain mail was inspired by the Society For Creative Anachronism, a medieval society that reenacts the lifestyle of the Middle Ages. Their use of chain mail for armor or decorative armor is wonderful, but I wanted to see if I could go beyond that use. My work still has some of the medieval influence, but I also added some modern flavor.

The three pieced I created were on display for a week and a half in the Burkhart Building of the first floor near the end of the Spring 1994 semester. I was very pleased with the responses I received from the display. On the next pages are photographs of the completed works and their individual project analysis.
Project Analysis: Medieval Dress

Materials Used: copper wire, chandelier crystals, purple velveteen, purple chiffon, purple broad cloth.

Basic Concept: A medieval court dress utilizing chain mail as ornamentation.

Influences: Early Anglo-Saxon (1100's) and early Middle Eastern

Construction: Dress was designed and cut out not using a pattern, but instead the traditional way. It was designed and fitted by laying on the material and marking the outline of the body. Seam allowances were also added. Sleeves and skirt were then added to the basic form.

A European chain mail design of 4-in-1 links was used for the chain mail waistline and neck line, but the construction of the links was done in a Japanese style leaving the links unrivetted and/or unsoldered together.

The chain mail was first constructed into complete pieces and then sewn on to the dress. Crystals were then added as a final touch to the dress.

Time Spent on Project: 2 months

Problems: weight of chain mail, crystals breaking in back, and links coming out of stitching

Resolutions: For the weight problem, the only thing that can be done on future projects is the possible use of anodized aluminum instead of copper, but I prefer the look of copper. The problem of the crystals breaking on the back side was easily remedied by removing the back crystals, but leaving the front ones on for decoration. For the links coming out of the stitching, I went ahead and soldered the top links so that they could fall off the stitching.

Self Evaluation: I really liked how this dress turned out. It is heavy, but the weight is balanced enough that it is not uncomfortable to wear.
Project Analysis: Chain mail choker with Celtic cross

Materials Used: Silver wire, silver sheet metal, gold sheet metal, and Hematite.

Basic Concept: A modern choker utilizing chain mail with some medieval influences.

Influences: Modern fashion and jewelry designs, Celtic design

Construction: First the chain mail of the choker was constructed with 20 gauge silver wire. It was given a point to accentuate the neckline. The clasp was then pierced and cut from silver sheet metal. The Celtic cross was then assembled. The silver part was first cut out and originally an Amethyst was bezel set onto the silver. But as luck would have it, the Amethyst broke so I had to remove the center. The gold ring was cut out and then solder to the piece. To replace the broken stone and the silver center, I then bezel set the Hematite to a separate circle of silver and riveted that to the back of the cross.

Time Spent on Project: 1 months

Problems: The stone breaking

Resolutions: As I mentioned before, the only real problem I had was a stone breaking. It was originally a square stone, which I thought gave a nice contrast to the circle in the Celtic cross, but the round Hematite turned out to be just as attractive. I was lucky my professor had one she could lend me.

Self Evaluation: This is my favorite piece out of the three. It was slightly more expensive to do, so I think I was more careful with constructing it. It is also the most practical of the three. Jewelry can be worn anywhere. I also got several offers to sell it or to make new ones, but I think I will keep it for now.
Project Analysis: Chain mail Bowl

Materials Used: copper wire, brass wire, brass sheet metal, copper sheet metal, copper piping

Basic Concept: Suspending chainmail into a bowl form

Influences: Modern bowl forms, different patterns of chainmail

Construction: My first task was figuring out how to make the chain mail hang properly in a bowl form. I did design drawings to help determine the size and depth I needed for the bowl. After that, I decided on what patterns would make the best form. I constructed the bottom in a circular pattern then did a variety of typical European chain mail patterns. I then cut and pierced a copper rim on which I attached the legs. The legs consisted of three copper pipes with brass half-spheres soldered on. Holes were then drilled into the rim and the chain mail bowl was suspended. Since the metal was too heavy for the rim, a second brass rim was riveted to the top of the first rim. A chain mail border of brass and copper wire was then constructed and added to the bowl.

Time Spent on Project: 3 months

Problems: weight of chain mail, legs’ design

Resolutions: I had a problem with the weight of the chain mail pulling the rim down. This was remedied partly by the addition of the second rim, but it could still use a thicker rim to balance it out. The legs also didn’t seem big enough for the bowl. Eventually, I will either put different legs on it or take them off completely and make it hangable for plants to go in.

Self Evaluation: I liked my design idea, but I don’t feel it came out the way I wanted it to come out. I think I did well on the chain mail, but could improve the rim and the legs.