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Charm Factor
Renaissance Man
Glimpsing Paradise

Trinket to Talisman

Contemporary Charms

by Vicki Halper



"I don't keep a journal," says Marge Levy, former director of the Pilchuck Glass School. "My life is recorded in charm bracelets."¹ We are sitting before her collection of 102 bracelets, some bought complete, but many assembled by Levy with charms collected abroad to represent the trips that mark her history. There are also two bracelets from her youth. One she received from her parents in 1948, about the time she started school. It contains some personal references (her first tooth, a Jewish star, a classroom bell, a bicycle), but also other charms (a coffee pot, a lantern) chosen by her parents for whimsy or sheer delight. When Levy was eight years old, her father's gold baby ring was added to the bracelet, and it remains her favorite charm among the 2000 or so in her possession.

Traditional Charm Bracelets
top: 1948-56, gold, 6 3/8" long
bottom: 1959-62, gold, 7 1/2" long
Collection Marge Levy
Photo: Larry Laurence

When Levy turned 16, she received a new bracelet with a large gold disk commemorating the day. Other gold charms marking her confirmation, graduation from high school, and college art major followed as she became a young adult. When her mother died, Levy removed a heart-shaped charm from her parent's bracelet and added it to hers. It is engraved on the back, "To Elaine from Maurice, 1957."²

Later kin to this charm collector are depicted in Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *Middlesex*. Narrator Calliope Stephanides describes the hierarchy of a private girls' school in the early 1970s. At the bottom are the Kilt Pins—"like the devices that held our tartans together [they were] unremarkable, dull, but necessary in their way." At the top are the Charm Bracelets:

From the slender wrists of these girls, tiny silver charms were chiming together. It was the ringing of tiny tennis rackets against tiny snow skis, of miniature Eiffel Towers against half-inch ballerinas on point . . . One girl held out her wrist to her friends, like a lady recommending a perfume. Her father had just returned from a business trip, bringing her back this latest present.

The Charm Bracelets: they were the rulers of my new school.³

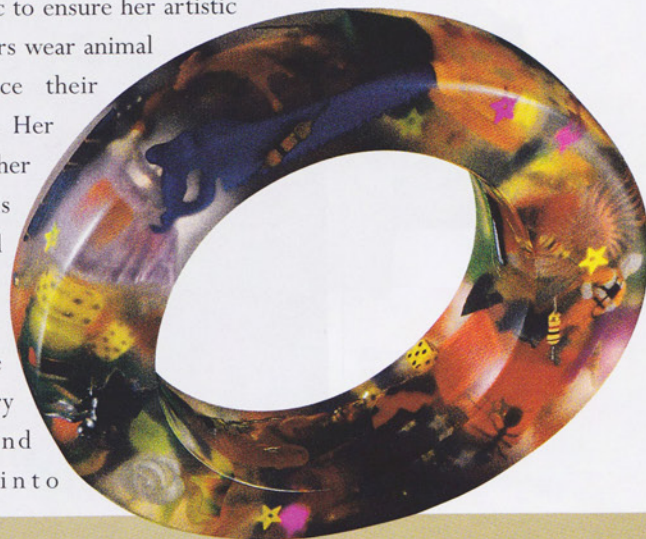
golden years?" Ebendorf wonders) that he fabricated and attached to the bracelet are fireflies to these menacing spikes. Get a tetanus shot before you put it on; don't wear white; watch your sweater. The grandparent who gives this bracelet demands to be honored as he is—crusty, gnarled, fragile, humorous, and still dangerous.

Perhaps Sonya Clark's ancestors would better suit? She did, after all, think of her Trinidad grandparents when she read the phrase "charmed lives." She wasn't glossing over their travails, but acknowledging their influence: "by their lives *my* life is charmed." Thinking of lockets, she placed their faces around her neck. One set of portraits faces the public and two other identical sets face her heart in "endearing, secretive, protectiveness." The beading in *Remembered Lives* is a metaphor for lineage: "string one to the next, to the next, to the next," Clark comments. The

branching pendant refers to genealogical roots. The white and silver color of the beads honors age in the Yoruba tradition; the black beads refer to the unknown. Clark is a praise singer for her grandparents, and wears their amulet, as praise singers do, to remember their deeds.

In another neckpiece, Kathy Buszkiewicz uses sympathetic magic to ensure her artistic prowess, as hunters wear animal claws to enhance their chances of a kill. Her shawl, like all of her recent work, is made of used and shredded paper money, which she buys by the bale from the Treasury Department and transforms into

Karen McCreary
Slice of Charmed Life, 2003
mixed media in cast resin
3 1/2 x 4 x 1"



Clark is a praise singer for her grandparents, and wears their amulet, as praise singers do, to remember their deeds.



Sonya Clark
Remembered Lives, 2003
glass beads, glass, photographs
15 x 2"
Photo: Norman Watkins