



'METAMORPHOSIS', 2022 (silver, linen rag paper cuttings from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books, paper; length 60cm, maximum height 5cm).

M E T A M O R P H O S I S

by Jane Partner

On exhibition in 'A Word After A Word'
at the Baltimore Jewelry Center, US, 18 February-26 March.

This neckpiece frames original printed letters that were once part of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books and reconfigures them to spell 'metamorphosis' (literally 'change of shape'), a word that reflects on their extraordinary material lifecycle.

These letters began as flax plants before taking a long journey to become paper. During the renaissance, paper was made from pulped linen rag, much of which came from worn-out clothing. The substance of these letters has therefore already been spun into thread, woven into garments and worn close to the skin of unknown people from five hundred years ago.

The transfiguration of these flax fibres into linen paper gave them a new life as part of the precious commodity of early printed books. The status of these prized objects is reflected in the lavish embellishment of the woodcut letters that are decorated with cherubs, plants and fantastical animals. The technology of movable type meant that these letter forms would themselves have been used over and over again to print different texts.

Sometime during the nineteenth century, these letters were cut from their pages and added to an archive of early letter forms, a collection that was recently divided up and sold at auction.

This neckpiece re-uses material that has already been re-used as a means to reflect on the deep time of the material objects around us and to place the idea of recycling into a longer historical perspective. It also makes a reference to one of the most influential literary texts from the period when these books were printed: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This long mythological poem deals in part with the transformation of bodies into other natural forms, as in the story of the forest-loving nymph Daphne who became a laurel tree. Artists depict Daphne as a hybrid tree-human, an image that has new power as we reassess our own relationship with nature. The wearing of the ancient plant matter incorporated in this neckpiece offers us a symbolic opportunity to enact that hybridity.

When placed on the body, the word 'metamorphosis' takes on another important meaning as a passionately affirmative statement of the potential for individual and social transformation. Layered over its meditations on time, materiality and ecology, this piece also communicates a one-word manifesto for positive change.





Jane Partner is an artist and writer who teaches at the University of Cambridge, where she is a College Associate Professor in English at Trinity Hall. Her creative practice and her research both explore interdisciplinary relations between the visual and the verbal arts. Other recent work includes a hybrid creative-critical essay in visual poetry: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/e198d6af-2aed-451d-959a-298d9630d223>