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Heckel: State your intention with style

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A belt buckles from Sweet Bird Jewelry.

As the saying goes — or maybe it's just evil irony — if you tattoo your lover's name on your body, you may as well schedule a tattoo removal while you're there.

Just ask Angelina Jolie.

The actress used to have "Billy Bob" on her left arm, for Billy Bob Thornton. Then they split. Jolie covered it up with map coordinates for where she adopted one of her children and where another was born.

Tattoo artists half-joke that branding yourself with a partner's name instantly condemns the relationship. But doesn't that defy the law of attraction, which says if you express your wish to the universe, it will come true?

Oprah Winfrey and fans of "The Secret" DVD and book haven't explained this one. So, as a tattoo fanatic with the incapacity to take anything at face value, I decided to overanalyze this myself.

I think the Billy Bob Curse is nature's way of bringing us back to ourselves. Tattooing another identity onto your body seems romantic, but it's at the expense of your own boundaries.

Yet I am a word-centric person (which is also why I dig making up words). I have been fired from every job I've had other than writing. Tell me you love me and I smile. Write it, and I'll cry. The written word is immortal, and, to freaks like me, it transcends pictures and symbols.

Jolie also tattooed a tilted cross on her stomach. Neh. But next to it, her ink reads: "Quod me nutrit me destruit," Latin for "What nourishes me also destroys me."

That. Is. Beautiful. And intriguing.

Instead of someone else's name, I think the best tats are personal and permanent: a dimension of yourself. Like my favorite tattoo on my left wrist, a tiny phrase that states my life's intention. And no, I'm not going to tell you what it is, because it's about me, not you. I call it an "inside secret" with myself. That. Is. Fun.

A deep appreciation for the combo of words, style and purpose is why I am ecstatic about the Boulder jewelry line Sweet Bird Jewelry.

Nancy Anderson started designing the sterling silver line about three years ago when she reached a point in her life — and her job — where she wanted greater meaning. The self-taught artist had just completed a belt buckle for herself that featured the Our Lady of Guadalupe and the phrase "Release the vision."

So she released hers.

Anderson has since made thousands of pieces, mostly buckles, that she calls "wearable shrines of intention." They're made out of recycled materials and antiques: bottle caps, coffee tins, photos, semi-precious stones, religious paraphernalia.

The pictures she builds out of these odd objects are like nothing I've seen before, and there seems to be one for every mood. Each scene is underscored by a quote, some famous, some that pop into Anderson's mind while she's working.

A few: "Legalize freedom," "Claim your soul," "She talks to angels," "Don't let anyone ever take your joy," and "Spare me, Jesus," next to a picture of bowling pins.

"It's a mix of irony and nostalgia, with whimsy," Anderson says. "I like to see people really connect, either with humor or sentiment."

Most have messages on the back of the buckle. A sort of "inside secret" with yourself. Like one buckle that shows an enshrined woman with wings and open hands. On the front, it reads "Resurrection" and on the back it says "Of the heart."

As Anderson puts it, "I want people to connect. My jewelry must have soul."

Fittingly, she donates a portion of her proceeds to the [Boulder-based nonprofit There With Care](#), which supports families with critically ill children (www.therewithcare.org). Anderson says she's creating a fund to help empower women to live their dreams. You know, to "release the vision."

Anderson also makes necklaces and earrings, but the cross-gender buckles are the most impressive. Plus, slap an interesting buckle on a plain pair of jeans and T-shirt, and you have an outfit with style — and intention. Less eternal than a tattoo, but it can be just as meaningful.

Find Sweet Bird online at www.sweetbirdstudio.com; at Tough Luck Cowboy, 2050 Broadway in Boulder; and at Cry Baby Ranch, 1421 Larimer St., Denver.

Sweet Bird also will have a booth at this weekend's Boulder Creek Festival. Even if you can't afford the price tag (earrings start at \$30, some buckles surpass \$500 each), stop by the booth to get inspired.

While you're there, greet my personal favorite buckle, and my next tattoo. Or at least my new Myspace profile quote.

The words, a la Janis Joplin, come framed in old beer bottle tops and ice-tea lids: "Don't compromise yourself. You are all you've got."

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