In the medieval social system called feudalism, the horse soldier, called a knight, wore armor. The knight was granted lands and the services of tenants who lived on and worked his land in exchange for his loyalty to a king or nobleman. Beginning in the 15th century, a more modern form of government gradually replaced feudalism. The knight’s role as a powerful combatant was reduced and replaced with foot soldiers. Even as the military role of the knight declined, his ceremonial importance increased.

A garniture is a collection of armor pieces that could be added or removed depending on how the knight intended to use it. The Art Institute’s example was made when the design of the garniture was mechanically and functionally perfect. This garniture is made of 24 parts, a small number compared to some made of more than 80 pieces. Each piece had its own purpose, yet was designed to harmonize structurally and artistically with the other pieces. For greater mobility, only half-armor was used during battle on foot and three-quarters armor was used for sporting events like jousting, a tournament where men ride horseback with lances aimed toward the opponent. The winner is the man who first knocks his opponent off his horse.

Various materials were used for armor, including sheets of leather, bone, and scales, but by the mid-13th century, armorners determined that metals such as iron and steel were most effective. In its entirety this garniture weighs more than 34 pounds.

Kings and noblemen often wore highly decorated armor to show off their wealth and rank. This garniture is highly decorative and includes symmetrical and intertwining lines that were etched, or scratched, into the surface. Mythological figures representing important traits or qualities can be seen in the large medallions on the shoulders, breastplate, and shoulder plate.

**Diagram of Three-Quarter Field Armor**

A. *helmet*: defense for the head
B. *gorget*: component that protected the throat and upper torso, covering the gap between the top of the torso armor and the base of the helmet
C. *breastplate*: plate armor for the torso, reaching just below the waist
D. *lance rest*: shock-absorbing bracket used in conjunction with the wooden spear called a lance, and fastened to right side of the breastplate, below the arm
E. *pauldrons*: defenses for the shoulder and uppermost part of the arms
F. *vambrace*: armor for the upper and lower arm, linked together by a cowter (elbow armor) at the elbow
G. *glovelets*: glove-like defenses for the hands
H. *cuisses*: thigh armor
J. *poleyns*: usually worn attached to the cuisses to protect the knees

**Questions**

- How many pieces do you think make up a full suit of armor?
- Who do you think wore armor?
- What was armor used for?
- Why do you think this armor is in an art museum?
- What is decorative about it?
- Why do you think something used in battle or games was decorated?
- What types of “armor” or protective gear do we wear today? How do materials differ?
- What parts of this armor correspond to protection we use today?