

BOOK REVIEWS

The New Beadwork.

Kathlyn Moss and Alice Scherer. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1992. 112 pp., 16 b&w figs., 127 color figs., glossary, bibliography, index. \$24.95 (cloth).

It's hard to think of a better way to spend \$24.95. To open this book, to browse through the pictures of the new beadwork, is to open a door into a magical new world. The familiar is transformed, mysterious, dangerous, breathtaking, whimsical. To see "in the flesh" Jeanne Leffingwell's *Sky Curtain* sweeping and shimmering across a huge architectural space is a compelling reason to visit Anchorage, Alaska. Her immense, complex beaded curtains banish forever the tawdry image of the bead curtain guarding the doorway to the back room. Through ornamentation and encrustation, Sherry Markovitz transforms animal heads into powerful totems, symbols of life beyond death. Jacqueline Lillie makes beads from beads, turning tiny beads into cool elegant jewelry while Pam Saporta makes her beaded beads in vibrant colors, recreating familiar bead designs. There are beaded paintings: Jimoh Buraimoh and his *Bata Drummers*, Susan Anniskett's *Tidal Pool Bag: A Tribute to Prince William Sound*, and Marcus Amerman's *Trailing-the-Enemy and His Wife*. There is whimsy in Sylvia Pomeroy's *Frogs' OXO Tic-Tac-Toe Game Set* and Setsu Ueno's wonderful miniature hats. There is anger and violence in Joyce J. Scott's *The Sneek*. These are just a few of the visual treasures that await you in this book. Can we see them for ourselves? In the discussions on beadwork in the context of modern art, the introductory essay provides some hope that we can. Several gallery and museum exhibitions held in the 1980s on the east and west coasts suggest that beadwork is beginning to move into mainstream art, in the way that quilts and other needle arts have done in the past 25 years. Jacqueline Lillie, for example, received a 1992 Rakow Commission from the Corning Museum of Glass.

What appeal lies in bits of glass, wood, stone, bone and plastic with holes in them? What do beads have to offer an artist or a craftsperson? The introduction by Kathlyn Moss and the brief notes accompanying the color illustrations provide some hints from the artists on the appeal beadwork has for them. On the surface, the beads are uncompromising, their shape, size and color are unchangeable and almost always determined by someone else. And that someone else is often halfway around the world and may even be from another century. The artist must conform to the bead. The artist can also be inhibited by traditionalists accustomed to ethnographic and fashionable beadworking techniques and designs. In spite of these constraints, as the works illustrated in this book show, in the hands of an artist beads offer a versatility and richness that no other medium offers. Suspended on thread they hang in the air, moving with the breeze. Resting against a body they follow the body's motions, like Flora Book's *Birds I* or Margot Marcotte's *Power Vision Shirt*, or the fringed jewelry. Beads can be sewn onto a backing, to carry or wear whenever you want. They can be woven into a solid self-supporting mass, they can be stitch around objects. Gretchen Newmark's *Snake* — beads wrapped around a stick of wood — has changed my view of driftwood bits forever. One of the few traditional techniques missing from the book is wirework. It would be fun to see what some of these artists would do with beaded bouquets or beaded baskets.

The best beads work together en masse and the ones chosen by most of the artists whose works appear in this book are glass seed beads. Mass produced, they come in a wide range of colors and sizes and are relatively controlled in size. Older beads can be reused, adding to the repertoire available from modern manufacturers. As a material, glass offers a complex relationship with light, from transparency to translucency to opacity. Juxtaposing these qualities against one another, as in Collaboration's *Blue Sky Kimono* or Carlos Cobos' embroideries, gives richness and depth to the beadwork. These light relationships change as the bead or the viewer moves.

Straight on the beads glow, taking the eye into the object. On a sharp angle the same beads take on a mass glitter, like sunlight on water.

Beadwork is not fast; it is the slow and patient building of many small objects to make a large object. Some of the artists compare it to meditating. Beadwork is also time-consuming because it is so hard to get materials. Finding the right color and the right size in the quantities needed can be as difficult as making the finished piece. Beadworkers do not have the service they need from bead manufacturers. Modern colors are strident and seldom come in the shade variations we need. Where in the local craft stores are hanks of beads in the subtle colors offered by DMC embroidery floss? Instead we are offered pricey little packages of beads in miserly quantities in too large sizes and nasty colors. As some of the artists commented, the collecting of beads was a long-standing personal passion. Acquiring beads is itself a quest: the secret supplier, the bead cards from the mail order company, the furtive guilty robbing of older pieces, the happy accident. Where, for example, did Sherry Hart find the subtle shadings she needed for the snakes in *In Light and Mint* or Virginia Blakelock the beads for her incredible *Daphnis Nerii*? Certainly not overnight or on one shopping trip to New York.

The New Beadwork offers more than pictures of artists' work. It challenges anyone working with beads to stretch their imagination and their traditional ways of working and thinking. The book offers inspiration for the simple and the complex, for elegant and chaotic, for inspired traditional and excitingly innovative bead art. The appendices comment on the modern bead industry and provide clear illustrations of basic beadwork techniques. There is a glossary, a bibliography and a list of addresses of bead societies and bead suppliers. My own personal challenge is to attempt a bowl, like Jeannine Goreski's *Red Bowl*, and to try my own version of Connie Wyatt's *Winter Dreams: A Trilogy*, small curtain-fringes hanging in a three-part screen. After looking through this book, all other bead books currently on the market are banal and stultifying.

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Trade Ornament Usage Among the Native Peoples of Canada: A Source Book.

Karlis Karklins. National Historic Sites, Parks Service, Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1992. 244 pp., 135 b&w figs., 20 color plates, 7 tables. \$15.25 Canada/\$19.80 U.S. (paper).

The use of trade ornaments among Native Peoples is a well-established fact. However, the extent, ingenuity, cultural preferences, popularity, and social and ceremonial uses of such ornaments are less well known. Karklins attempts to remedy this situation by extensively studying journal accounts, photographs, paintings, ethnographic reports, ethnographical specimens and archaeological information, and evaluating and compiling these data into one source book. The result constitutes a work both informative and readable, thereby extending its prospective audience beyond the academic or interested researcher.

The book begins with an introduction discussing the sources, their biases, and the arrangement of the material chronologically by tribe as defined by Diamond Jenness. Each of the seven identified cultural regions merits a chapter, beginning with the Eastern Woodlands and progressing west and north. Chapter eight acts as a summary with no formal analysis or interpretation.

Each chapter follows a similar format. First the cultural area is defined geographically along with a brief discussion of the cultural and linguistic groups within the area. Depending on the information available and the similarity in trade ornament usage among a number of the tribes, a few are discussed further in detail. For each group, Karklins begins with the earliest known contact or access to European trade goods and chronologically documents the uses, preferences and changes in trade ornament usage into the early 20th century. While the firsthand descriptive accounts provide accuracy and historical flavor, the inclusion of numerous illustrations of people and objects helps depict practices which are difficult to visualize or create by words alone. A table at the end of each chapter provides a quick reference by listing the various ornaments employed by individual tribes on gender and age criteria.

In this study, trade ornaments include not only items directly or indirectly obtained from white