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Reviews and End Matter

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BOOK REVIEWS

Floral Journey: Native North American Beadwork.

Lois Sherr Dubin. Autry National Center of the American West, 4700 Western Heritage Way, Los Angeles, CA 90027. 2014. 258 pp., 216 color figs., 15 B&W figs., index. ISBN 978-0-615-88449-3. $65.00 hardcover; $48 paperback.

Floral Journey: Native North American Beadwork is the catalog for the exhibition of the same name which runs through 26 April 2015, at the Autry Museum in Los Angeles, CA. It is written by the author of *The History of Beads* and *North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment*, as well as numerous other titles dealing with Native cultural material, both modern and old.

Floral Journey is a tour through a style of beadwork practiced by Indians all over the U.S. and Canada, that of working the floral form in beads, generally via embroidery. Dubin includes everything from moccasins to bags, clothing and horse adornment. While much of it was made during the 19th and early 20th centuries, some late 20th century work is used to illustrate particular points, and the finale is a chapter devoted to new pieces. There are a few examples of pre- and early-contact work pictured as precedents for the floral material, including a gorgeous, elaborately-scrolled Naskapi robe collected in Labrador in 1740, worked in quills and paint on caribou skin, and a wampum belt woven in the late 18th century.

Following an "Introduction" in which Dubin lays out the importance of both flowers and beadwork to Native peoples, she begins with "Cosmology: Sacred Foundations, Art, and Floral Imagery." A section called "Adornment: History, Trade, and Transformation" then follows. After these opening chapters giving the backstory, both the sacred and the secular, she divides *Floral Journey* into different sections of the continent: Woodlands (nearly half the continent), Southeast Woodlands, Northeast Woodlands, Great Lakes, Subarctic, Great Plains, Plateau, and Great Basin. Some chapters more tribally related cover material of the Cree, the Métis, and the Northern Athapaskan (Dene).

Dubin supplements the geographical sections with more narrowly focused writing, to wit "The Double Curve Motif and Floral Imagery;" "Floral Art as Commodity;" "Great Lakes Birch Bark, Quillwork, and Flowers;" "The Iroquois and 'The Art of Flowering';" "The Great Lakes Bandolier Bag;" "Moose-Hair Tufting;" "A Thorny Identification: Rosebuds as Symbols of Native Identity;" "The Delaware Pouch;" "The Prairie Style;" "Sioux-Métis Flower Beadwork;" "Contour Floral Beadwork and Numerology;" "The Gould Family: Six Generations of Beadwork Legacy;" "The Octopus Bag;" and "Flowers and Formal Attire: Indians and Cowboys." On a personal level, I found the sections dealing with the Delaware pouch and Prairie Style to be especially fascinating as these are two areas of North American Indian beadwork of which I've been only peripherally aware. It was great to have the chance to dive deeply enough into them to have a good basic sense of their origins/changes over time and their place in the larger picture.

Other voices weigh in at times. The first is that of Ella Barnes Bluestone Ree from Barbara Feezor Buttes' (Mdewakanton), "Beading the Medicine Flowers: Mdewakanton Women and the Art of Survival," on the importance of medicine plants to Native peoples, and the recognition that flowers were often the means of identifying medicine (and food) plants when seeking them. The second important voice is that of Steven L. Grafe, Art Curator at the Maryhill Museum of Art in Goldendale, Washington, who places the use of flower imagery in beadwork in its correct Plateau context, noting that the pleasure in doing beadwork and an appreciation of its ability to make its wearer "beautiful" is how the doing of beadwork on the Plateau is generally approached. Dubin is to be commended for welcoming this voice, contrary to some of her major points, including her emphasis on sacred meanings and numerology in Plateau design.

The final chapter, "Contemporary Expressions: The Cultural Continuum," is devoted to the work of Indian artists now, thus reinforcing the reality that beadwork lives on for Native people, sometimes worked in the old styles, sometimes making witty plays on traditionally familiar techniques used by people who nonetheless live in a very modern world.

One of the great strengths of *Floral Journey* – and indeed, of all her books – is Dubin's firm commitment to an abundance of great pictures of wonderful work, mostly shown in color. Many of the pieces pictured are supplemented with additional detail shots and happily the book's designer eschews an unfortunate contemporary design style of tiny pictures surrounded by lots of white space popular with all too many designers these days. Many of the pictures here fill the page and provide the avid beadwork fan with more than enough detail for hours of pleasurable browsing. Another of Dubin's regular features in her books that has always been appreciated by the reader are her inclusion of good, clear maps. Especially interesting is the one in the section dealing with the Prairie Style of beadwork that illustrates the coming together in Oklahoma environs of various tribal peoples from West Virginia to Wyoming and many points in-between, due to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and how all those various folks influenced beadwork designs in the coming decades.

Dense, detailed information about each of the tribal groups gives a good sense of how trade and contact influenced each area and over what time period. The writing is enriched by quotes from copious interviews she has done with Native people around the U.S. over the last few decades, relating their thinking about the beadwork done by them or their ancestors.

Reading about the beads which filtered into the Woodlands, one gains the impression on page 40 that Woodlands people may have been the origin for the terms "gooseberry bead" and "seed" bead; nothing could be further from the truth. Peter Francis, Jr., posited that the term "seed bead" likely stemmed from the popular term "seed pearl," which seems as good a theory as any and notes several uses in literature from 1803 and later, along with corresponding terms in French and German. Regarding the coining of the term "gooseberry" beads, Francis notes that "the first known use of the name was in 1704 when John Barbot… engaged in the slave trade in Nigeria" described the beads most in demand as including "beads gooseberry color, large and small."

And while it's popularly assumed, as Dubin notes for Figure 40, that the paper patterns behind the beading in Iroquois beadwork served as templates for the beading, likely of equal importance, if not the main reason, is the fact that whatever is used to back the beads serves to reflect light back through the largely transparent beads, rather than allowing the light to die on the usual dark blue or black velvet ground. The templates also raise the beads above the velvet pile, preventing them from sinking in.

The caption for a photo in Figure 167 showing Warm Springs women holding large flat bags, some beaded and some cornhusk, records that "after Euro-American contact, Plateau women turned their large woven root-storage bags into smaller versions called 'twined flat bags'…." Actually, the larger root-storage bags were also "twined flat bags;" the term is not a description for a new, smaller style. She also notes in the same caption that "most Plateau beadwork designs were pictorial, of which floral motifs comprised a percentage." In general, many Plateau flat bags, whether beaded or especially those that are twined, show pictorial images on one side, including many with flower motifs, and geometric images on the reverse. In my experience, it is the rare twined bag that doesn't follow this two-sided format and this has been true as well with many of the bead*woven* Plateau pieces I've had the opportunity to study over the last seven years. She also says that "many women therefore applied their weaving skills to making smaller personal items such as woven handbags (now called 'cornhusk bags')." To be more precise, strips of corn husks were used in lieu of the earlier beargrass to ornament twined bags during the making of them. The term "cornhusk bag" doesn't refer to a size, as there are both small and large cornhusk bags. It refers to a material that has in many cases been dyed and is visible in the pattern, the use of which marks a change from the usual use of one material to the later use of a different material.

Regarding dating the arrival of seed beads on the Plateau, Dubin notes "beginning in the mid-1860s, as small glass seed beads in a variety of colors arrived in the Plateau…." Yet, a beaded firebag picked up along the Columbia River between December 1849 and June 1850 clearly shows that glass seed beads as small as size 14 were available on the Columbia River during that time, though admittedly in a relatively limited color palette. Given the sophistication of the work collected, it's not unreasonable to assume that such beads had likely been available in the area for several years, possibly back to the mid-1840s.

Much is made in *Floral Journey* of the notion of cultural resistance and an emphasis on secret language. While I think that much that is in modern Indian design most definitely speaks to a sense of Indian identity and yes, cultural resistance, I think in earlier times, if Native people used designs and cultural references from their heritage, whether in lieu of Euro-American designs or coupled with them, it was as often as not because it was simply what was familiar and available to them and what they considered beautiful. Undoubtedly there may have been a few examples in which someone incorporated an important element "under the noses of the oppressors;" however, there appears to be a trend of which this book is part, to give voice to the notion that cultural resistance was a much bigger part of the act of creating objects 100-150 years ago than I believe it likely was. I think it's impossible to know what any one person from long ago thought about their work. So many Indian

cultures were in a state of disarray, due to catastrophic losses of community – both geographic and human – and the need to quickly adapt to a dominant culture which controlled their access to resources. Given the immense amount of energy and desire needed simply to survive, I'm not convinced what the point would have been to stitch resistance into their beadwork, nor can I imagine an organized sense among many people to do so, let alone across a continent among peoples with little to no contact with each other.

Regarding numerology on the Plateau, while individual numbers may possibly have had meaning for an individual beadworker (and we can't know, since we can't speak with them), in general, the sense of there being a consistent, region-wide, readily understood meaning to specific numbers as used in the counts of beadwork motifs is unlikely.

In general, I am uncomfortable with the impression that most Native beadwork of the 19th and early 20th centuries was suffused with *secret* meaning. Through time immemorial, women have beaded largely because they love the medium – its beauty, tactility, color, and sparkle – and the sense of accomplishment and pride in seeing it worn by those they love, as well as to provide sustenance for their families by making beadwork for barter. White people studying native cultures have a tendency to want to see more deep and significant meaning to things than is often there. White people like to name things, to pin them down, and in a sense, through knowing, to own them. Sometimes heightened meaning is there and sometimes it's not. And sometimes Native people don't want to share what is truly theirs with outsiders. That should be their prerogative and respected. We've certainly taken enough from them.

One final wistful note: I would love to have seen one of those specialized side chapters devoted to the Grey Nuns and their impact on the beadwork of hundreds, if not thousands, of Native women in the northern latitudes, rather than having tantalizing bits of information about them sprinkled across several chapters, along with similar repetitive references to the fur trade, both of which understandably were done by the author and her publishers to allow each chapter to stand on its own. I've always been curious about them and wanted to know more about what they taught and, more importantly, how they taught it. I found fascinating how Dubin related stories of how the moosehair embroidery was swapped back and forth between the nuns and the Native girls, as to who was teaching who and at what point in time. Some day, someone is going to *have* to write the definitive paper on those women and their beadwork/needlework teaching practices.

In *Floral Journey*, Dubin has skillfully stitched together the thoughts of many important voices in the field, including David W. Penney, Ruth Phillips, Ted Brasser, Barbara Hail, Benson Lanford, Dennis Lessard, Martha Berry, Barbara Loeb, Steven L. Grafe, James Teit, Frank Speck, Kate Duncan, and Cath Oberholtzer, among others. Dubin has curated and written yet another desirable book for several audiences: beadworkers, of course, as well as material culture lovers, those who are interested in the cosmology of Native peoples, history buffs, and most definitely, Native people themselves. *Floral Journey* is dense with useful, intriguing information and the author's deep respect for the creators of the work covered shines forth from every page. Native peoples could scarcely ask for someone who cared more about them and their work.

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World on a String: A Companion for Bead Lovers.

Diana Friedberg. Self published, Los Angeles, CA. 2014. 440 pp., numerous color figs. ISBN-13: 978-1-62620-778-3. $45.00 (soft cover) in the U.S.; $77.50 and $87.50 postpaid to Canada and international destinations, respectively. Available from Amazon.com or www.worldonastringproject.com.

In a blazingly beautiful book documentarian Diana Friedberg has recorded her 10-year journey producing the DVD series, *World on a String*. Highlighted are still images of the beadmakers, wearers, and users who were seen in action in the DVDs. Thus *A Companion for Bead Lovers* allows the reader to return again and again to contemplate and savor the dramatic diversity of the many places where beads come alive. Because the text is concise, informative, and unique in its on-site insights, readers learn as well as enjoy the book.

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As she traveled, photographed, and interviewed for the series, Diana also collected many of the beads and beaded articles that she saw – and she saw a lot! The visual journey continues as strands and individual beads, having been strung, are shown as interpreted by various leading bead artists. Also featured are double-page spreads of finished bead art not seen in the DVD series.

The illustrated backstory of how the whole *World on a String* project came to be is presented in the preface. There is a very useful map marking the 45 locations documented in the book. The introduction discusses the earliest history of the bead. The section "What is a Bead?" offers physical and philosophical definitions of a bead and its meanings.

"The Legacy of Glass" presents 201 images of sites of glass bead manufacture. Photos on this subject include glass and faience beads from Egypt, Italy, the Czech Republic, Africa, Austria, and the United States, worked by renowned artisans such as Luigi Cattelan, Art Seymour, Gail Be, Valerie Hector, Stuart Abelman, Cedi Djaba, Tim Meikle, and Suzanne Miller.

"The Power of Stones" includes 230 photos of precious stones such as amethyst, carnelian, and jade. Others are shown from myth to mine to method. It is followed by "The Metamorphosis of Metals" which illustrates gold coins and ancient plaques, Royal Ashanti gold jewelry, and the products of metalsmiths from Mali to Mexico, silverwork of Bali, Nepal, India, Thailand, Nagaland, and Egypt, plus examples of brass, copper, and aluminum ornaments made in Africa. "Organic Gems" are represented by such natural materials for beads as shell, coral, pearls, amber, ivory, bone, wood, cork, paper, seeds, and nuts, all shaped and strung into spectacular necklaces.

"The Ubiquitous Seed Bead" has been manufactured for centuries in Asia and Europe. The application of seed beads is a specialty of the Huichol of west-central Mexico who use the beads to create psychedelic images, Zulu and Ndebele artisans in South Africa who message with beads, and designers worldwide who embellish adornment with them.

The section "Body, Soul, and Beads" presents 190 photographs, large and small, that depict protective Anatolian "eye" beads, precious Tibetan Dzi beads, and mystical talismans, amulets, and prayer boxes hung on strands of prayer beads. In "Anything Goes – Fun with Beads" the focus is on modern wearable bead art such as Jamey Allen's original use of polymer clay to make replicas of ancient beads. Finally, "Bead Lovers Around the World" shows bead markets in Ghana and Ecuador, mountain men in Utah, Masai men and women in full beaded regalia in Kenya, bead buyers and sellers in Morocco – in fact, people enjoying beads just about everywhere. This section ends with a useful study aid, a page of organized topics.

The author acknowledges the fine professional colleagues who helped her create *World on a String: A Companion for Bead Lovers*. Special mention is given to Los Angeles photographer Joel Lipton. Diana Friedberg had a precise, worldly vision for her book, including high-fashion models, a contemporary take on tribal make-up and textile styling, state-of-the-art technology, and a presentation that honors each object. By collaborating with Joel Lipton in the studio, Diana's vision has been realized with stunning results.

World on a String: A Companion for Bead Lovers is an important addition to bead literature. The book has been well received by the international bead community and is likely to bring new members into the fascinating world of beads.

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