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BOOK REVIEWS

Photography of Personal Adornment.

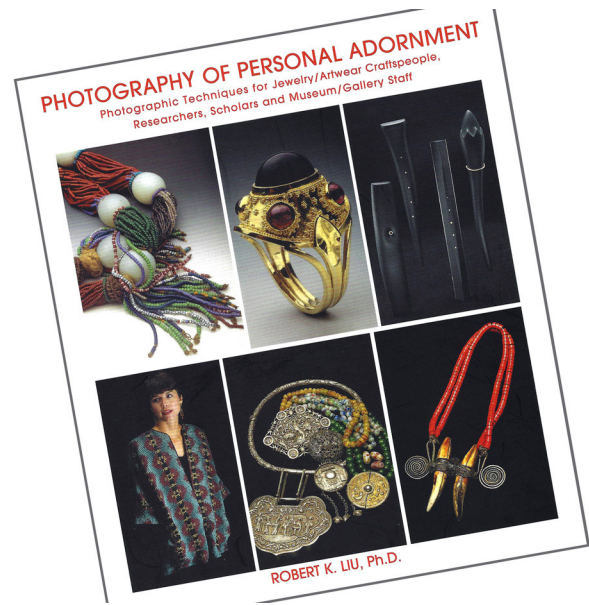
Robert K. Liu. Ornament, P.O. Box 2349, San Marcos, CA 92079. 2014. 160 pp., 520 color and B&W figs., glossary, index. ISBN: 978-0-692-32387-8. \$38.95 (paperback).

Just about everyone in the bead world is familiar with the luscious pages of *Ornament* magazine which are made so by the gorgeous photographs of sumptuous objects of bodily ornamentation. Created in a photographic style both highly recognizable and influential, *Ornament's* pages are very desirable places for artists' work to appear, in large part due to that beautiful photography. Reading *Photography of Personal Adornment* is like spending an afternoon surrounded by a pile of *Ornaments* from the last twenty years, engendering a feeling like visiting with an old and much-loved friend, but also making it harder to see the images anew for their being so familiar.

As the originator of *Ornament's* photographic style, Robert K. Liu, a self-taught photographer, brings to the magazine's pages a discerning and particular eye, one utterly devoted to showcasing beauty. In this book, Liu promises to show the reader how to compose works for photography, how to use particular lighting, backgrounds, and props, how to "see" what works and what doesn't, what to consider when shooting magazine and book covers and advertisements, and things to remember while shooting in non-studio settings.

Liu's Preface and Acknowledgements clarify his background and photographic education and set up the *Ornament* back story. The Introduction covers the general history of the use of first film, then digital cameras to document fine craft work, and discusses some shortcomings of the changes in how photographic images are captured, yet acknowledging the benefit of software to enhance what could only previously be done laboriously in the darkroom. A survey of photographic and studio equipment follows which, while thorough, is not meant to be an exhaustive study of what is needed or how it is used. Following the excellent base he establishes here, further reading into the use of digital cameras and the purchase, production, and use of studio equipment is advised. Liu's suggestions

for narrowing the many choices faced by the novice photographer are especially helpful. He illustrates his many points with good, if small and sometimes cramped, photographs of picture setups and photo studios.



Of especial use are images of the same object(s) shown with different backgrounds or lighting, to illustrate the differences that occur when one varies shooting methods. It encourages the novice photographer to test a number of different backgrounds, systems of lighting, and camera angles to see what best shows off an individual piece. With the immediate feedback of digital photographic systems, this is now easy to do. Sometimes the differences are quite dramatic.

With many of the shots, Liu discusses in great detail how the shot was set up, and describes the use of handmade devices to hold objects at particular angles or "levitate" them in the air so that they float freely. He points out the use of any number of props and systems for grouping objects, and introduced me to the idea of using a bit of beeswax to "stick" an object where it is wanted, without harming either the object or the background.

Ornament's photographs are so dramatic in large part due to two particular elements: simple, clean backgrounds (light-absorbing black Tuf-Flock, soft white backlit translucent Plexiglas, and light-to-dark shaded Varitone sheets) and lighting (softboxes, backlighting, reflected light). Liu provides significant information about both. Moving on in the book, he discusses the process for determining the best layouts of the pieces being photographed, compares ways to vary the layout, discusses imitation materials, describes how to create photographs of craft processes and what it's like in photographic and artists' studios, explains how to work with models, how to shoot beads, beadwork (though far less of the latter), and clothing, and delineates the process of setting up shots for magazine covers and advertisements.

Moving out of the studio, Liu writes about dealing with museums and the special problems of shooting therein. *Photography of Personal Adornment* ends with the photographing of events, including fashion runways and exhibition openings, and a glossary of photographic terms, references/bibliography, and an index.

Liu says "If you are lucky enough to get great material to photograph, it is almost a crime not to be playful." I think this is an important consideration to remember and it is well illustrated throughout his book. He also emphasizes the importance of shooting details as well as full shots for the additional detail provided in a closeup (i.e., the Asyut dress, p. 146; Kathleen Dustin's *Village Women* beads, p. 45). Throughout the book, he discusses the various craft techniques used by the artists, thus giving any reader who loves crafts a greater understanding of just how many of the pieces pictured were made, and emphasizes the need to understand what you're shooting so that you can shoot it properly.

It was sadly sweet to see the photograph of Gabrielle Liese in her younger days, reminding us that *Ornament* has been recording the history of the bead movement as well as the modern art jewelry/clothing movements, showing in the pages of both *Photography of Personal Adornment* and *Ornament* the work of many artists, scholars, and gallerists, recording important museum exhibitions, and noting the existence of the bead museums and bead groups now passed into history. This is an extremely important legacy to leave behind.

There are a few things I find uncomfortable about the book. It is in a smaller format than needed, squeezing much

text and many pictures into a page size that did none of them much good, with the text tightly kerned to maximize the amount of verbiage included. Some pictures were difficult to discern (i.e., some shots of studios) for having too much visual information crammed into them, and there were a surprising number of typos, a bane to someone like me whose eye cannot help but zero in on them. Sometimes the same term was rendered inconsistently (talhakimt vs. talhâkimt, for instance) or was used improperly (pre-columbian vs. pre-Columbian). Because the book draws exclusively from material shot for *Ornament*, the style is so strong and consistent that not only are many people already using it, thanks to the magazine's influence, but with the advent of *Photography of Personal Adornment*, many more will as well, thus potentially watering down the long-term impact of the style. It may have been beneficial to contrast the *Ornament* style with that of other photographers so as to offer further choices of how to approach the photography of such objects.

Overall, however, *Photography of Personal Adornment* succeeds because it takes a popular magazine recognized by most jewelry and clothing artisans, who likely have it on their shelves, and parses the process used in creating the photographs within, instantly giving the reader immediate tools for making their own wonderful photographs. Liu points out what succeeds with juries and customers, and gives people good and bad examples from which to learn. He discusses materials and processes that make good pictures much easier to take and answers the question many undoubtedly have had: "How did Robert take that picture?" He makes strong, beautiful photographs easily doable by anyone with a modicum of camera skills with a teaching skill that conveys important and complex information relatively clearly. I wished I'd had this book when I was shooting images for publications and postcards in the 1990s. Finally, unlike so many people who live "only in the now," Liu recognizes and points out that photographing all this material helps "preserve it for the future," even those photographs not intended for publication. This book is well worth adding to the library of anyone seeking to document their own and others' work.

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Beads from Jablonec: A History in Beads.

Floor Kaspers. Marblings Publishing, Amsterdam. 2014. 115 pp., 133 color figs. ISBN: 9789-49131-1024. \$27.00 US (paper cover), \$37.00 US (hard cover). Also available as a free PDF download.

Floor Kaspers has already produced two small books (17 cm square) on beads. One takes the reader on a visit to the famous annual bead show at Tucson, Arizona; the other on a visit to Briare in north-central France. On the bead trail, we now get a visit to Jablonec nad Nisou, the Czech beadmaking city formerly known by the German name Gablonz.

The first part of the book covers the early glassmaking period, 1550-1750. The next period of glassmaking (1750-1918) includes discussions of molded beads along with the equipment used, faceted beads including “Russian” beads, followed by an architectural digression on the town of Jablonec and the glassmakers, especially the Riedel family. Also discussed are special beads such as those of uranium glass, special shapes for overseas markets, “Hubbell beads,” and Swarovski glass. During the 1918-1945 period, Jablonec craftspeople made a wide variety of beads and other jewelry, some of it influenced by Oriental and Egyptian styles.



The war years saw Jablonec under German occupation which involved Sudeten Germans taking over beadmaking from the pre-1938 Czech population. After the war, the Czech majority expelled most of the Germans in a reaction against the Nazi occupation. This meant that many beadmakers left the area and bead and bijouterie production diminished sharply. The post-war period is hard to disentangle, as accounts are colored by political bias. Five industries evolved into a new grouping under the name of Jablonec

Bijouterie. This evolved into the state company Jablonex, later taken over by Preciosa. Beads and jewelry continued in production with cheap labor provided by prison inmates. After the Communists lost power in Czechoslovakia in 1989, production continued through private enterprise, but lost ground to India and China. Kaspers’ historical narrative derives from a number of sources which are meticulously noted in the Notes and Bibliography at the end of the book.

Bead illustrations form a major part of the pictorial copy which range from sample cards though equipment for bead manufacture and work places, to examples of different sorts of beads, and even dumps where discarded beads lie in colorful spread. As with Kaspers’ other books, there is a variety of local scenery as well as a goodly number of purely bead images, including a glassblower on page 12 and another on page 103, as well as numerous shots of factories and miscellaneous architectural features that provide a sense of visiting the town as a whole, rather than focusing solely on beads and bead production. The illustrations range from full-page to smaller ones at four to a page. Many have a caption or other ways of identifying the subject. When a caption is absent, it can be sorely missed.

The Contents page comprehensively lists the subjects covered under five subdivided headings, making it easy to find the way about. It would, however, have been an improvement if page numbers had been added to the subject headings. This lack may have arisen from the way the Blurb self-publishing platform seems to process the copy that it works from, which appears to be a direct printout, with no scope for editing the copy or the pagination. This means, for example, that on page 110, the entry for “Francis, Peter” has got the entry for “Hannich, Wilhelm” stuck on seamlessly, and the entry for “Kaspers, Floor” is split up, ending two pages later. There are several typos which might have been avoided if the production method had allowed for an extra proofreading. The four-page bibliography includes Waltraud Neuwirth’s bilingual book on *Beads from Gablonz* (1994); it would have been useful to include the version published in *Beads 23* (2011). The bibliography shows that there is already plenty of published material concerning Jablonec; this little book is a delightful addition to the whole.

The book is available in both a hard- and soft-cover version, as well as a free PDF download: <https://beadmuseum.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/beadsfromjablonec.pdf>.

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Heidi Munan and Anita MacGillivray (eds.). Craffthub, No. 96 Main Bazaar, First Floor, 93000 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. 2015. i-vi + 238 pp., 23 color and B&W figures. \$65.00 plus postage (paper cover). To order, contact craffthub@gmail.com.

This journal publishes the nine papers presented at the 4th Borneo International Beads Conference held in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, 9-11 October 2015. The articles reflect the conference's theme of "Stringing the Past and Present." They range across continents and time periods, but the connection between the past and present is made.



"American Indian Beads and Beadwork," by Jamey D. Allen, discusses the beading traditions of the indigenous peoples of North and South America, but mainly focuses on those of the United States. It discusses these traditions according to whether they occurred before or after European contact, as well as the incorporation of introduced European beads into Native constructs. Allen indicates that beadwork was likely introduced by early European traders.

"The Archeological Beads of Palawan," by Jun G. Cayron, takes the reader on a journey to important archeological sites on Palawan Island, the Philippines: Ille Cave in Dewil Valley, El Nido in the Tabon Cave Complex, and the Pandanan shipwreck. These sites contained glass beads imported from Arikamedu in India, Chinese beads, jade from Taiwan, and gold beads. The trade routes that probably transported these beads are discussed. Shell

beads were the most common and there are indications that they were manufactured on Palawan Island. The Pandanan shipwreck, which has been dated to the mid-15th century, contained various artifacts including Vietnamese earthenware ceramics and beads in Vietnamese stoneware jars.

"Immersion in Modern Medias – The Allure and Attraction of Polymer Clay," by Lara Le Reveur, discusses this medium and how she uses it. She also provides detailed information on the steps in using this versatile type of clay.

"The Art of Bead Stringing – Artist to Entrepreneur," by artist and entrepreneur Elaine Robnett Moore, provides practical and creative advice that includes the factors affecting the overall beauty and visual appeal of bead artwork along with practical ways of getting the pieces into the marketplace.

"Threading for Survival: An Insight into Contemporary Rungus Bead Culture in Kampung Tinangol, Kudat in Sabah," by Reita Rahim and Malina Soning, shows the evolving traditions of the Rungus people of Sabah, Malaysia. The writers, who are from Gerai OA, a non-profit group that works with indigenous women's groups to increase economic security, discuss the external influences, the economic necessity, and a famine that forced the community to enter into beading, as well as current issues that the artists face.

"Tamilakkam: A Multi-cultural Centre for Bead Trade," by Ashvin Rajagopalan and Darshini Sundar, outlines a study that aims to understand the bead trade in Tamil Nadu, India, from 400 BCE to the present day. The writers correlate the beads found in the region to the history of India, Roman influences, trade, and beadmaking techniques. They note that the beads produced at Arikamedu, mother of Indo-Pacific glass beads, are found in Europe and Southeast Asia. In fact, Cayron commented in his paper that beads produced here were found at the Palawan Island archeological sites.

"Turkish Tradition in Contemporary Malaysian Garments," by Dr. Khatijah Sanusi, begins with a description of the evolution of Turkish garments. She then shows the connection to contemporary Malaysian *Baju Kurung*, which is a long, knee-length caftan worn over a long pleated skirt. The Turkish people, who originated in eastern Central Asia and Russian Siberia and migrated towards Eastern Europe in many waves, wore loose-fitting clothing embellished with decorations that could include bead embroidery. Dr. Khatijah draws parallels to this style of clothing, and then discusses the work of two bead artists who also embellish

traditional garments with beads. Wan Norzita Othman adorns the traditional *Baju Kurang* while Azmatul Hazrin creates striking beaded bib chokers.

“The Lukut Sekala Bead of Borneo,” by Wendy Terang, focuses on a single valuable bead, the *Lukut Sekala*, which has cultural, ritual, and economic significance for the Kayan and Kenyah, two of the many indigenous groups of Sarawak, Malaysia.

“Unravelling the History of Glass Beads in Arnhem Land, Australia,” by Daryl Wesley and Mirani Litster, charts the early history of the indigenous people of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Australia, which includes interaction with fishermen from Makassar and Sulawesi, as well as Europeans and other foreigners. Archeological sites in the

region that yielded beads date to 1668-1780 and 1810-1921. Possible ways that the people of the area obtained (earned, traded, or were given) beads is discussed.

The articles in the journal are diverse and sweeping in their scope. This variety of topics and interests is the publication’s strength as it reaches out to multiple bead groups including artists, historians, archaeologists, and bead lovers in general.

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